

ILLYRIAN VENTURE



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(KERKYRA)

ILLYRIAN VENTURE

THE STORY OF THE BRITISH MILITARY MISSION
TO ENEMY-OCCUPIED ALBANIA 1943-44

by

BRIGADIER
'TROTSKY' DAVIES
D.S.O., M.C.

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PERSONAL INTRODUCTORY MEMOIR

by

General Sir James S. Steele, G.C.B., K.B.E., D.S.O., M.C., LL.D.,
Colonel, The Royal Ulster Rifles

I WOULD hazard the guess that a host of 'Trotsky' Davies' friends might not immediately recognise the christian name which appears in the title of this book. By that nickname he was known throughout his Army life, gaining it when an officer cadet at Sandhurst for his display even then, in the words of one of his instructors, of 'independence, intolerance, robustness, a keen sense of humour and a kind of disciplined bolshevism.' He ran true to form, but as he grew older, mellowed and gained in experience, he exploited these characteristics to advantage, and in no phase of his career were they better demonstrated than in the period with which this book is concerned.

Trotsky and I were close friends from the time he joined the Regiment in Mesopotamia in 1920, where he quickly made his mark by winning the Military Cross in the first few months of his service. He showed his superb fighting ability a second time in Palestine in 1938—winning a bar to his Military Cross. When the record of his gallantry in Albania became known he most worthily added the D.S.O. to his row of ribbons. He was an outstanding leader in both peace and war—the beau ideal of a Regimental officer.

One of the most difficult decisions Trotsky had ever to make was when he was asked to accept the leadership of a Special Mission in the Balkans—he had his beloved Battalion in superb trim awaiting the opening of the Second Front. I am much gratified to read his

own testimony that he did not regret the choice he made to have a go at the unorthodox and the uncharted. It brought about a chain of experiences calculated severely to test all those qualities which have already been mentioned.

The narrative teems with examples of the notably characteristic way in which he grappled with events. I would like to enumerate but a few:

His feeling of exasperation in dealing with Enver and the complexity of adjusting his straightforward soldierly outlook to the political palavers and procrastinations of the Partisan chiefs:

His fury at the expenditure of precious ammunition to celebrate a wedding or a funeral:

His despair at the ineptitude displayed by the Partisans in the abortive attempt to cross the River Skumbini:

His 'sighing' at the thought of what might have been achieved had there been displayed the smallest bit of will to fight the enemy wherever met:

The degradation of being chained in pairs whilst being transferred to an Oflag in Germany.

I can only recall one instance where he lost his patience and that was a 'calculated' outburst. The reader will find in the book an amazing record of his robustness and evidence of his sense of humour in the most perilous and delicate situations. What could one find more typical of Trotsky than the altercation he had with the infamous Commandant of Mauthausen Concentration Camp?

The story ends with his return home just before V.E. Day, but his doggedness soon asserted itself again. He made light of a very severe 'tidy up' operation and went on to command an Infantry

Brigade in Greece and another in Palestine before he took up his final command—the South Wales Territorial formation. Whilst there he worked on this story in his spare time, and the day before he died he posted the final draft to the publishers : it reached the desk of the head of the firm with a notice of his death pinned to it. There is no doubt that his terrible experiences during the one and a half years of his service described in these pages finally took their toll and his sudden passing, still in harness, was a great shock to all his friends.

We as a Regiment are proud of him—he has added much lustre to our records.

Lustleigh,

Devon.

December 1951.

FOREWORD

by

General Sir Frank E. W. Simpson, K.C.B., K.B.E., D.S.O., A.D.C.,
Director of Military Operations at the War Office in 1943-44

IN THE second world war, when the Allies were fighting on so many fronts, so often most desperately, there were continual and determined attempts to make the utmost use of every possible source of help, whatever its nature. In these conditions encouragement of and aid to 'resistance movements' or partisans in enemy-occupied territories never failed to present what looked like golden opportunities. It seemed that a comparatively small investment in manpower and material resources might reap enormous dividends.

The encouragement of guerrilla activities behind an enemy's front is nothing new; since the earliest times it has been employed in most campaigns of which descriptions exist. But the development of air transport and of long-range communications with portable wireless sets has made the possibilities of organising trouble for the enemy in an occupied country very much greater in modern war.

In the second world war, prior to 1944, nowhere did the opportunities seem as great as in the Balkans. Not only were the German forces heavily committed there, but the rugged nature of the country as a whole and the wild and turbulent characteristics of the majority of the peoples lent themselves admirably to the purpose in view. It seemed that it should not be too difficult to kindle and fan a guerrilla warfare along the German lines of communication in Yugoslavia, Albania and Greece, which would become more and

more intolerable to the enemy. He would thus eventually be forced either to accept defeat or withdrawal, with all the loss of strategical advantage, men, material and prestige that would involve, or to reinforce, with consequent advantage to the Allies on every front.

Great as the possibilities were, however, those concerned with the direction of the war from London had to weigh them against the diversion of resources which would be involved. It was not merely a matter of sending on a mission a few gallant officers and other ranks with a total of weapons, ammunition, supplies and the like which was insignificant in comparison to the amounts being used on the main fighting fronts. Whether we could really afford to divert even these small numbers and quantities became a question which had to be most carefully considered.

The diversion of manpower resources itself caused anxiety. It was not so much that the numbers were great as that missions such as the one described in this book attracted the very best type of officers and other ranks. We have never had in war quite as many really good junior leaders as we would like: the commanders of our forces were naturally loth to lose some of their best. They wondered whether some of the diversions were justified, especially as very few of the individuals employed in the many Allied missions ever came back to orthodox operations while the war lasted.

On the material side, the type of equipment required by the missions was often that in short supply. Also, the airborne maintenance of our many missions, carried out as it usually was in most difficult country and hazardous weather conditions, was probably more expensive in aircraft and aircrews, of which there were never enough, than was realised at the time.

The simple and directly told story of Brigadier Davies must be read against this background. He was

given a task which, however it might have looked at the time, now seems to have been almost an impossible one. It is clear from what he says that our intelligence as regards conditions in Albania was extremely nebulous. As a good regimental soldier he was pitchforked into an extremely tricky political situation, where it was never quite clear exactly what he was to do as regards helping either one or the other of the differing factions.

As often occurs with partisans in Albania, it was difficult to ensure that operations were closely related to the conduct of the war in the Mediterranean theatre. There were times when the Allied intentions did not fit in with the partisan desires. Sometimes, for instance, it suited the Allies to draw the enemy reserves into a particular area at the same time as the local partisans were trying to drive the Germans out of it. While it might have been thought that the one certain aim that the Allies and the partisans would have in common would be to destroy the enemy, it nevertheless occurred sometimes, as this book shows so well, that this desire on the part of the partisans was subordinated to that of dealing with their rivals.

Another point brought out is within the experience of most missions operating in enemy-occupied countries. In the good times when all went well, the work carried out by such missions was a very great factor in raising the morale of the local people. If things went badly, however, the reverse effect was produced; not only was there then a lowering of the morale of the inhabitants but Allied prestige generally suffered a setback. Quite often if things went wrong the members of a mission would find that the helping hand was replaced by the cold shoulder, and that, in addition to the refusal of protection, they were also denied all important information about the enemy.

All these issues are shown most clearly in Brigadier

Davies' book. He does not attempt to assess the dividend paid, and I do not think it is possible for anyone else to do it either at this stage. What is clear, however, is that his Mission consisted of some very fine individuals who worked together as a good and gallant team. One cannot help reading of the endurance and spirit of Arthur Nicholls without being reminded of the very similar courage being shown at that very time behind the enemy lines in Burma by Seagrin—both of them received the posthumous award of the George Cross. The ever cheerful Sgt. Smith was the British n.c.o. at his best: he was always a tower of strength. Brigadier Davies himself showed that dogged obstinacy in times of trouble that all who knew him would expect, though he probably displayed even greater determination and endurance after he was so badly wounded and taken prisoner. The wonder is that he can have gone through all that and then come out alive and able to carry on his work in the Army as a trainer and commander of troops.

Therefore, if it is difficult to assess the exact military value of this Mission to Albania, there can be little doubt that the high standard of courage, determination and endurance displayed by those who took part stands comparison with that of any other mission sent out by the British either before or since. There is no doubt that it made a deep impression on those who knew about it at the time: it will make the same impression on those who read the story now. Perhaps also there are now in Albania many who, although they dare not show it, have their hearts in the right place and still remember with respect and affection certain British officers and soldiers who were prepared to give everything to help them in their times of trouble. Who knows that from this seed something well worth while may not even now be sprouting?

*One crowded hour of glorious life
Is worth an age without a name.*

THOMAS O. MORDAUNT

CHAPTER ONE

WE SAID goodbye to everybody and climbed on board. While the pilot was running up the engines I pulled on my flying suit over my battledress, felt the pockets to make sure that torch, map and pistol were handy and not forgotten. My fingers fumbled with the zipp-fasteners. Sweat trickled down my body. After standing in the sun all day the fuselage of the Halifax was like an oven. Clouds of sand were hurled across the airfield by the slipstream of the propellers.

At last the big four-engined bomber trundled round to the north end of the track. Again the engines were run up, switches were thrown, revolutions remained steady. The pilot's hands fluttered over the controls in a last-minute check. Satisfied, he squared up on the runway. His hand went up to his microphone and I knew he was saying, 'Hullo TOCRA Tower, Colour 6, permission to take off, over.'

I looked over to Colour 7, due to follow us in an hour, which should give us ample time to get the Dropping Zone clear of all our junk.

Now we were airborne, crossing the boundary, over the tents and the parachute shed, making height. We turned right-handed, still climbing. Message was passed round, 'Stand down from take-off stations.'

Major Chesshire, Sgt. Melrose and I settled down in the fuselage, packed with panniers and packages. There was scarcely room to make one's way aft to the jumping platform—the doors in the floor were shut. How typical of the Services, I thought. They provide aircraft at the school in which we learn to jump out of a side door, and then they give us an aircraft for

our operational jump, when we are already het-up and strained, with a hole in the floor through which we drop—quite a different technique.

The Halifax seemed huge and crowded after our small training Lockheed Hudson. A pamphlet chute was surrounded with packages—the dispatcher preferred to throw them through the door in the floor, hitting the edge to break the string of the package. A flare was dropped through the chute to test for drift.

One of the crew came back to say I could go forward and sit with the pilot if I liked. Forrester was sitting solemnly chewing gum, flying the Halifax at 14,000 feet. I was no longer sweating, but very glad of the flying suit. Forrester passed me some gum. We both chewed, side by side.

Down in the Mediterranean a large convoy was heading east. We were avoiding a patch of bad weather by going over to Malta before turning north-east, and the Halifax waded through great masses of cumulus cloud to find Malta straight ahead.

We now made course for Valona. Sicily passed to port, followed by the toe of Italy. The Ionian Sea was beneath us. I thought of the fifty years in the beginning of the last century, when Britain occupied the Ionian Islands, Corfu, Ithaka, Cephalonia and Zante. In Corfu the small Greek boys still play cricket with stumps chalked on the wall.

It was getting dark as we came level with the heel of Italy and opened the Straits of Otranto. Over Valona flak burst round us. Forrester kept on course and continued chewing.

'Time for you to get dressed, sir,' he said. 'Good luck and good landing.'

I nodded, 'Many thanks—let Cairo know when we're on the deck.' I hoped that the section staff officer would send an appropriate message home for me.

I found Chesshire and Sgt. Melrose asleep. I woke them up. We had a sandwich and a hot drink, and then put on our harness and parachute. The dispatcher checked fit and hooked us up. There was more flak over Tirana. The R.A.F. sergeant bunged some pamphlets down at them through the doors in the floor, which were now open.

The dispatcher was listening at the inter-com. Forrester's voice came through.

'We are right over it now. I can't see any lights. No lights. No lights. Yes! Yes! Circling down.'

After a while the code signs were exchanged with the Dropping Zone, which proved our identities, and on the ground fires were lighted.

We were losing height. I signalled to Chesshire and Sgt. Melrose, thumbs up. They grinned and in return gave me the O.K. I felt it was time to take a look at the ground. A mountain-top shot past. It was better to watch the warning light. We did a left-hand turn and steadied. I found myself humming a tune of the day, 'Coming in on a wing and a prayer.'

The dispatcher touched me to be ready. The red light came. I took a deep breath. 'Green!' I jumped into the centre of the hole, position of attention, looking up. My back was to the slipstream, the wind took my knees. It was like sitting in an armchair—much quieter and comfier than the Hudson; no fierce rush of the slipstream, with the two inside engines throttled back. I dropped and dropped. Would the 'chute never open? A jerk at my shoulders. I looked up. The 'chute had developed—all was peace.

I looked round for Chesshire and Sgt. Melrose. They were nowhere to be seen. Had they missed their turn and gone round again? I looked round me. A tinsel Christmas card could not have beaten the scene. A low moon was hanging like an orange in the sky, three mountain peaks stood up round me, white

granite sparkling with frost, a bowl in the mountain tops, into which I was falling, with forests round the edges, a white plain in the middle, broken by a stream winding its way across. Why was the plain white? Was it snow? No, it looked more like salt flats. The three fires gave the line of flight for the aircraft. There was a breeze which was carrying me across the stream, then back into it, then over it, thank Heaven. I reached up on the lift webs and tensed myself. Feet together, knees together, turn obliquely. And then I fell through fifty feet of mist on to frosty grass.

It was a soft landing, if not a good landing. I had come to 'The White Land,' famous for woodcock. I got up and took my harness off. Men were running towards me, men with slung rifles and bandoliers, wearing the red Partisan star in their hats or on their coats. They surrounded me and shouted 'Bravo! Bravo! General.' There was great excitement.

The crowd was parted to let in an English officer, wearing an Albanian white fez-shaped hat.

'I'm Smiley, sir,' he said. 'McLean is coming over to you. Are you all right? Did you have a good landing?'

'Yes, I'm all right, but can you collect the other two? They were to have jumped in a stick with me and I could not see them in the air.'

'The partisans have gone to bring them in, we saw them as they dropped,' he answered. 'We had better get off the Dropping Zone, the aircraft is starting to run in with the stores.'

As we hurried to the side, Major McLean came up and introduced himself. Chesshire and Sgt. Melrose joined us. They had also both landed on grass but very close to an unpleasant patch of rocks on the other side of the stream, which was larger than it had seemed from the air, and was not lacking in boulders.

The Halifax flew in on the second run with engine

exhausts spitting fire. The containers were dropped, clanking and cannoning into one another. One parachute failed to open. The container made a noise like a bomb falling before it buried itself in the soft ground. It was not easy to see the coloured canopies as they fell. We kept well clear until the panniers and rhomboids were dropped, when the Halifax winked at us with its Aldis lamp 'All out' and climbed steeply. Colour 6 had gone in successfully.

CHAPTER TWO

IT WAS quite unexpected that my Regular Army career should take a sudden turn to the unorthodox.

We had just finished the first day's grouse shooting on a moor in Roxburghshire and were standing on the crest of a hill talking over the day's shoot before we went down to the farm. It was a lovely evening. The colouring of the heather in that Border country seemed to melt into the shadows in the distance. We were all tired. The day had been thoroughly enjoyable after months of combined operations at Inverary, and divisional exercises around Hawick.

We were walking down the hill path when we heard a motor-cycle ponk-ponking past the farm, and saw a liaison officer in his crash helmet making for us. The brigadier objected at once to the sight of the officer, who could be up to no good out here at this time. We left him reading a message and walked into the farm, where the keepers had laid out the day's bag.

He followed us into the farmyard, and called me on one side. My heart sank. I, too, had suspected that motor-cycle. 'Look, Trotsky, you've got to catch the night train to London to report to the Military Secretary. You're wanted for some special job.'

I asked what it was all about. He handed me the message to read, which told me no more than he had said. I asked him if I could refuse the mysterious job.

'You had better go down and see what it is all about—let me know as soon as you come back.'

I pulled a face. None of us wanted to be parted at that stage of the war. We were very happy and confident in each other. It was 1943. We had already

just been deflected from landing in Sicily, when a Canadian division had taken the place of 3rd Division at the last moment, a bitter disappointment.

Training and training, month after month, year after year, exercise after exercise, but at least we did keep together and would be a tough proposition for the Boche when eventually we hit him. None of us wanted to leave the battalion, the brigade, or the division.

I hurried back to Hawick, changed and packed. After meeting the Military Secretary in Town, I was told to report to H.Q., 21st Army Group, where I was given a staff car to take me to my destination, a house at Yateley, where an officer in mufti was waiting for me.

'I understand you have come to volunteer for a special job?' he said.

'I want to know something about the special job before I think of volunteering for it,' I replied.

'Well, briefly, you are required to jump by night into a mountainous country occupied by the enemy, and there to organise resistance. You will rank as a brigadier and command the military mission. Will you volunteer?'

My heart started sinking. It seemed a fantastic thing to ask a regular battalion commander to do. Here was I, right up to date, waiting to go into action with as good a battalion as one could wish. Why take me from that to go on some cloak-and-dagger exploit?

'Do we wear uniform?' I asked him.

'Yes, always.'

'Where is the country?'

'The Balkans. You would go to Yugoslavia to help a commander who goes by the name of Tito.'

Why had I been selected for this task, I who knew nothing of the country or the people, could not parachute, and was aged 43? War Office had selected me

from their records. His task was to interview the officers selected. I asked if I might speak to the Military Secretary before I gave my final answer and was told that I might, providing there was no delay as the officer questioning me had to get back to the Middle East urgently.

I saw the Military Secretary in the evening, and as a result of the meeting I volunteered to go. Once the decision was taken, the unpleasant part of the appointment seemed to disappear. It became just another job to be done in rather unusual circumstances. Looking back, the only apprehension I felt was when the choice first had to be made, and now, years after I took the chance, I do not regret my decision. I was to fly to Cairo forthwith.

I returned to Hawick in the morning, and told my Brigadier the worst. My second-in-command hurriedly took over from me, and I arranged with him that some of the officers should follow me out to the Middle East as liaison officers.

There followed a few days in London at the H.Q. of Special Forces, filling in papers and arranging my air passage; at the last moment I was told to get a passport and travel in civilian clothes as the aircraft would be landing in Portugal.

Mufti was difficult. I had nothing but uniform with me, had no access to my baggage and no time to shop. The alternative when we landed in the neutral country was to wear the only clothes I had resembling mufti, a pair of jodhpur riding breeches with a blue shirt.

We flew from Lynham airfield, near Bristol, after the usual delays.

The Liberator took off at one in the morning suitably blacked out, and we headed for the Atlantic. Peering out of the curtains it seemed certain we were being shot at by a night fighter, until I realised it was

the hot carbon from the engines' exhausts that looked like tracer bullets.

I dozed off and woke up stiff in my seat to find we were flying south-east, and the sun had just risen. Ahead of us was a big bank of sea fog. The pilot flew straight into it, to see how thick it was, and then climbed rapidly into clear air. We skimmed along the top of the cloud—uneven great balls of cotton wool, pink, mauve and golden. As we crossed the coast of Portugal the fog broke up into cumulus cloud and the ground showed up red, with green trees and white houses. We soon left the clouds behind and, circling the airfield, the country was gay with colour, and houses purple with bougainvillea.

As we taxied in to the airport buildings, it was strange to see German swastika markings on aircraft and German crews standing about.

We spent the day at the Avenida Hotel. After wartime England the food was excellent and, in particular, we appreciated the mayonnaise sauce, made into sauce tartare with chopped parsley, capers, gherkin, tarragon and chervil. The dining-room was crowded with travellers of different nationalities, but we were intrigued with the Germans, most of whom were young men of military age. One came over to our table to ask if he might borrow our English newspapers, and took *The Times* and the *Telegraph* we had brought, to translate them to the others. There must have been some good news for us at the time, judging by the grim expressions on their faces, which anticipated final defeat.

The shops were full of interesting things, like watches, cameras, shoes and evening dresses, which had long since disappeared from our shops at home. In the cool of the evening we sat in the café, in the middle of the street, with the traffic either side of us. My gymkhana kit caused much interested comment.

We took off when it was dark. All Spain and Portugal were lighted, and towns and villages showed up to great distances. As the Liberator approached Gibraltar, an air exercise was in force, searchlights sought out every possible approach to the Rock. We flew at about one thousand feet, with navigation lights showing. Searchlights picked us up, passed us on, until Gib. had faded out astern; and while we headed south-east, beneath us a series of prisoner-of-war cages herded the Afrika Corps together until they could be distributed where they were most wanted for security or work.

As dawn was breaking, the aircraft circled Castel Benito, petrol lamps shining out of the tents, eucalyptus trees in rows, airport buildings battered and destroyed, a Dakota throwing up clouds of dust as it took off.

We had breakfast in the mess tent, waited on by a cheerful Wop, everything indescribably dirty, and flies abounding. Being airborne again suited us.

It was an interesting flight over the desert battlefields—everywhere there were tracks and signs of fighting, signatures in the sand. The battle had swung backwards and forwards; the story was fresh in our minds.

We flew past Cyrenaica and crossed the coast at Tobruk, followed the sea for a while before passing Sidi Barrani, Matruh and El Alamein. Somewhere down the coast it began to get too hot, so I went aft and changed into drill. The rear turret of the Liberator gave one a grand view of Hell-fire (Halfaya) Pass. I remembered that when General Wavell was fighting the Italians over this ground he sent home a classic signal, as the bulk of his troops had to be sent to Greece. 'Having achieved a satisfactory inferiority of one to four, I feel I can now attack.'

We landed at Cairo West, in the desert, and felt

the heat as we climbed out and walked across to the airport buildings.

There was no one to meet me, and no message. A staff car arrived with a bewildered driver, not sure whom he was meeting, so I seized him and drove to Grey Pillars, G.H.Q. I was shown up to the office of the Chief of Staff, Special Forces, the officer who had interviewed me at Yateley, Brigadier Keeble of the Wiltshire Regiment. He has died since the war. I got to know him well during the time I was in Cairo. He was a bundle of energy, and a great man for getting things done. At that time he had a lot to do, with Special Operations Executive expanding all over the Balkans and the Middle East. Like all men of drive, he was apt to put some people's backs up, and, in his impatience to get results, he was not always easy to work with, but few senior officers have his extreme energy.

Keeble took me out to his flat at Zamalek and made me comfortable. Brigadier Armstrong was also staying there; I had known him in Cairo as a subaltern in the East Surreys. He was due to jump in to Mihailovitch, so we were able to talk over our future roles and prospects.

Keeble quickly told me that I was no longer to go to Tito. The Prime Minister, Winston Churchill, had ordered that Fitzroy Maclean, the M.P. for Lancaster, was to take charge of the Military Mission to Yugoslavia, where, later, Randolph Churchill joined him. Brigadier Goschen was to have come from Scottish Command to jump into Albania, but Keeble had cancelled his posting and detailed me to go instead as adviser to Enver Hoja. Goschen then went to Burma, where he was killed by a sniper.

My programme before setting off for the Balkans was a full one. The staff in Cairo taught me as much as was possible in the time of the history, geography,



ALBANIA
General area of operations

politics and economy of the country. Among the things I learnt were that the name Albania probably means 'The White Land' or 'Snowy Uplands.' Even when there is summer and no trace of snow is showing, it could still be called 'The White Land' from the white patches of marble that streak the rock of the mountain tops. Natural long-range rifle shots, the Albanians use the white rocks across a valley as targets.

Albania is a small country, with an area of 11,000 square miles, at the southern outlet of the Adriatic Sea, flanking the Straits of Otranto. In length it is just over two hundred miles, in breadth a hundred miles at its broadest part, but as it is mostly a mountainous country, these measurements give a false impression of the difficulties of travel, especially as communications are bad, and confined to ill-maintained roads, joined by rough mountain tracks. An inch on the map may equal ten miles on the ground, but does not convey the climbs and drops and twists of the paths as they wind through forests and valleys over the contours of a ridge of hills.

Railways there were none to learn about. Travel was mainly on foot, with pack mules and ponies. All very Eastern. A few airfields were in use by the Italians and the Germans, but only Tirana aerodrome was of any size. Flying over those mountains is not always easy, hot and bumpy in the summer, windswept and cloudy in the winter, with always the risk of a heavy thunderstorm. Most Albanians are good walkers, can cover long distances and make steep climbs without distress. The mountain streams are excellent for drinking and much patronised by the 'Eagles of the Mountains' as the Albanians are proud to call themselves. Their national flag is the two-headed eagle.

Such plain as there is lies near the coast and is



DETAIL OF SHADOWED AREA ON MAP
Area in which British Military Mission operated

heavily malarial. The roads are built on the low ground and in the valleys. This meant that the enemy kept to his lifelines and garrison towns, while the resistance forces mainly stayed in the mountains. With an aggressive guerrilla force the high ground should have dominated the roads, but there was too much of the 'live and let live' about the resistance at this time.

Main roads cross the boundaries into Greece and Yugoslavia and play an important strategical part.

The two chief ports on the coast are Durazzo, the northern one, and Valona, a natural deep-water harbour opposite Brindisi. Scutari, Tirana, the capital, and El Basan are perhaps the best known of the towns.

The rivers are much what one would expect in a mountainous country; one can wade across them one day and be blocked by a deep torrent the next, as the snow melts on the high ground above or heavy rains drain away to the sea.

Of lakes, there are three, Scutari in the north, Ochrid and Prespa in the east. They were of interest to us mainly as a means of supply by seaplanes and also a quick pick-up rendezvous for officers and casualties going out, but owing to lack of suitable aircraft these big expanses of water were never used. It should have been easy to arrange occasional sorties on to them.

Dropping Zones were not easy to find on the ground and were difficult to locate from the air. The lakes would have increased our channels for supply and distribution of stores.

The Yugoslavs and the Greeks are Albania's only neighbours and both are suspected as having designs on next-door territory by the Albanians.

The climate naturally varies according as one is in the plains or on the high ground, but, in general, it is fairly hot in the summer and extremely cold in the winter, with boisterous winds in both seasons and torrential thunderstorms. In the autumn the peasants

will show one the snow gauges on the mountain passes, dead tree trunks with marks nailed to them to show the depth of the winter drifts, and it seemed hard to believe then that snow can pile up so high. In winter one can walk over the frozen crust of the snow with the top marks showing that there is ten feet of snow below.

The population is not much over one million, within the borders, but there is an overflow into Montenegro to the north, the Kossovo region of Serbia to the east, and Greece in the south. Equally, a certain number of Greeks have overflowed into Southern Albania. There are Albanian minorities in Turkey and in the south of Italy and Sicily, but with these exceptions the population, small though it is, seems to have stayed put for a very long time.

Religion has played a large part in the life of the people. Since the time of the Byzantine Empire, Catholicism had been strongly established in the mountains of the north. When the Turkish Empire spread west in the latter half of the fourteenth century, the property owners of the Balkans were faced with turning Moslem or losing the support of the new régime. They were given a choice of three alternatives. First, to embrace Islam. Secondly, to be put to death as martyrs. Thirdly, to pay a heavy tax to retain their old religion.

One must realise that the tax was crippling and when it was paid a man was left with little more than his religion. It is surprising, therefore, how many people chose the third alternative. Certainly very few chose to become martyrs, but seventy per cent. of Albanians took a practical view of the situation and adopted the Moslem faith, because the Turks allowed a person who made that choice to accept public service positions anywhere in the Ottoman Empire, irrespective of the country of his origin. What is more important, the

upper classes were allowed to survive and retained their social position. As an equal and ally of the Turks, the Albanian received protection against his old enemy, the Slav. He prospered and rose to important positions. Mohammed Ali was supreme Pasha in Egypt, and built the famous Mosque at the Citadel. No less than thirty Albanians rose to be Commanding Generals in the Turkish Army in 1914, while twenty-two Prime Ministers came from 'The White Land,' and Mohammed Kuiprili became Grand Vizier of Turkey. The parents of Kemal Ataturk came from Albania.

In Greece, a prominent part was played in the life of the country by Albanian statesmen, soldiers and especially sailors. The island of Hydra, not far from Piræus, is an isle of Admirals, whose naval tradition owes much to its Albanian origin.

So it is quite obvious that it paid to belong to the religion of the Ottoman Empire, and that is why such a large part of the population in the central plains bordering on the Adriatic are still Moslems, some of the Sunni sect, some Bektashis. The religious influence shows itself in numerous mosques and minarets, in the costumes of the country people, men and women, and in the building of the houses. The Moslem faith made little progress in the north, in the inaccessible mountains, where the Turks could not penetrate, and had to acknowledge the presence of infidels practising Catholicism. Likewise in the south, where the orthodox religion had spread from Greece, the people were poorer, owing to the rough hilly country, and could afford to ignore the Mussulman. If you have nothing to lose the invader has no advantage over you, and it is easier to resist his religion.

Accordingly there survived in the north Franciscan and Jesuit Catholics, in the centre three-quarters of the

people became Sunni or Bektashi Moslems, and down in the south the orthodox Greek Church retained its following.

The only person who was able to give me direct information about Albania was Mrs. Margaret Hasluck. She had lived fifteen years in the country as an anthropologist. She spoke Albanian fluently and had written the only Albanian grammar and phrase book. She told me that it was a language as Indo-Aryan as our own, with a highly individual grammar, with many inflections, peculiarities and irregularities. She was telling me!

She told me of the folklore of the people, of the Ghegs from Gegnija in the north and the Tosks from Toskeria in the south, their areas divided by the River Skumbini, which was to give me so much trouble. She told me of the characteristics of this small race with a long history, very proud of themselves, very touchy, looking for slights where none were meant and, accordingly, difficult and aggravating. They could be very charming and good hosts, cheerful and amusing. In contrast, they could be very stupid, stubborn and infuriating.

For a large proportion of the population life was primitive. Blood feuds still existed, deadly quarrels between families to avenge a wrong or an imagined wrong. In one village in which she had stayed, a young man and a girl, from families at enmity in a blood feud, were in love. They eloped to the forest higher up the mountain, but were forced down by bad weather and lack of food. In their happiness they returned to their village, hoping to be forgiven and allowed to marry. Each father shot his own child.

From Mrs. Hasluck we passed to the economic warfare section, who wanted up-to-date information from officers in the field on the oil industry started by the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company, the chrome, copper

and lignite mines supplying Germany and, therefore, a good target for sabotage. Great forests of beech trees, oaks and pines cover the mountains. Could they be used or were they inaccessible? Without proper roads and railways were they a commercial proposition? Two bullocks dragging one tree trunk down mountain paths rutted deep from years of use would hardly do. Was there sufficient tobacco, fruit and agriculture to develop trade? Albania's geographical position was good, with sea and ports to carry her produce, and airports convenient for international airlines. Would we answer these questions in due course?

Much time was spent choosing our clothing and equipment. In the end we were overburdened and could have done with far less than we took. But we were told that we would be operating in extremes of climate, hot and cold, for at least a year, and, except for occasional air supply, we would be cut off. It was thought that our base would be safe in the mountains, and that we would raid from there. At that time any question of civil war within Albania was not considered, so that we expected help from all parties.

Our organisation, which was known as 'The Firm,' had equipped a hut with every item of kit we were likely to want, and it was easy to walk round and look and say 'One of those, two of those.' Each item was weighed for air dispatch. I was told that I would need a smart uniform for prestige at conferences of the Albanians. How little they knew!

A lot of my time was spent interviewing volunteers, both officers and n.c.o.s. They were given intelligence tests, 'matrix' tests, medical examinations. I had a talk with each individual. The n.c.o.s were either wireless operators or military experts, who could handle foreign weapons or could deal in explosives. The officers came from every arm—Household Cavalry, Guards, R.H.A., Sappers, Infantry and R.A.F.

All were a lively, cheerful crowd, good collectively and as individuals. From the nature of the task, rough living in a strange country, into which they were to arrive by parachute descent into the mountains by night, the volunteers were mostly young men in their twenties, lacking experience in diplomacy and foreign relations, eager to fight and defeat the enemy. This way of soldiering was unorthodox, was free, if not easy, and appealed to different types of men. Regulars and wartime servicemen were both there, and they worked together very well.

The large wireless station by the Pyramids was our link with the outside world, and we had to be familiar with the operators we were to work with. The cipher section was also vital to us, as all messages to and from the field went in code, and it was not popular when Cairo asked us for repeats. The section was worked by girls, a large number of whom came from South Africa. My own cipherine was a well-dressed, good-looking girl who came, I think, from Cape Town. Her code name was 'Maggie.' I shall always remember the cheerful messages she used to send me in the field. After some long political signal there would come 'Personal to Trotsky from Maggie—what can I send you for Christmas?' And I would reply at the end of some long report, 'Personal for Maggie from Trotsky—a hot water bottle, South African pattern preferred.' And would you believe it, when the Christmas aircraft dropped our load, there was a large parcel for me which unwrapped and unwrapped, and, right inside, was a very small hot water bottle marked 'South African pattern, bad luck.' After the war I tried to get in touch with her to thank her for the many comforting parcels she sent to me: whisky in a water-bottle with a rubber cover over the cork, chocolates and Groppis sweets, books, and a dog collar engraved 'Biza' for my French bulldog,

captured from the Germans in El Basan. Perhaps I will be able to thank you personally one day, Maggie. I remember you wanted to marry an Englishman, tall, dark and handsome!

The problem that worried most of us was how we were going to keep in touch with our friends and relations once we had gone behind the lines. Our London office had invented a series of standard messages which we could order to be sent to various addresses at different times. The officer in Cairo, who censored our mail from England which was dropped in to us, made additions of his own to our messages from matter culled from the letters. For instance, a message might be chosen, 'Fit and well.' He would add, 'Received your letter 10th. Delighted twins doing well. Tons of love. Rodney.' I'm afraid our relations and friends were a bit bewildered at these messages, as they had no idea where we were or what we were doing, but for them it was better than receiving nothing from us and getting anxious. As long as our Cairo office used imagination and sense, security was not broken and morale was kept high.

As soon as we had learnt the theoretical side of our assignment it was time to learn how to parachute. The two doctors who vetted us in 'The Firm' had both been intended to go into the field, but the big Army doctor had broken a leg during his practice jumps, and the Navy doctor had broken his back. They were quite casual about it, but were not a good advertisement to a learner like myself.

I flew from Heliopolis in an Egyptian Rapide, landing at Port Said and Haifa. A staff car met me and drove me to Ramoth David airfield, on the plain not far from Nazareth where 'The Firm' had a small camp which was primitive and uncomfortable. A constant stream of officers and n.c.o.s of all shapes and sizes spent about ten days learning to jump by day and

by night. With us there were Americans, Poles, Yugoslavs, Greeks, Czechs and Iraqis. How the R.A.F. instructors coped with them all without misunderstandings and accidents I do not know.

The weather was hot, which made us supple, whatever else it did. I doubt whether I could have survived a course in the cold at home. As it was I was doubtful of my left leg, which had shrunk a bit after a wound in Palestine in 1938. 'If you do what you are told you can't come to much harm,' said our youthful instructor, fair-haired and cheerful, a butcher by trade, a professional boxer by inclination. He came from Taunton way. I took his word for it, did what I was told and came to no harm; it was hard work but exhilarating. We paraded at crack of dawn on the airfield, we ran for miles to get fit, we did P.T., horsework, groundwork, to make us supple. We tumbled incessantly on mats, on the ground, at the halt, on the run, from heights, from moving trollies. We practised exits from aircraft from static wooden mock-ups. We fell through holes into sandpits—and woe betide you if you looked down, which made you lean forward and bang your nose on the side of the mock-up—'ringing the bell' they called it.

There were some high swings in which one stood on a high platform in parachute harness attached to a gallows. When the instructor screamed 'Go!' you launched yourself into space, swung violently downwards, just missing the ground, then backwards and forwards, practising turns by twisting, the idea being to teach you to come in to land travelling forward.

To give us confidence in the parachute we were given demonstrations of how it was folded and packed, the sergeant instructor who demonstrated to us being quite excellent. His patter was quiet and clear, the movement of his hands swift and sure. I went up to him afterwards to congratulate him on his impressive

performance. Asked what he was doing before the war, he replied, 'I was packing for the King at Buckingham Palace.' It was reassuring to feel that our 'chutes would receive such expert handling.

The time soon came for the practice jumps. We were divided into 'sticks' of ten, dressed in a smock to prevent clothing catching in the rigging, a Sorbo rubber helmet protecting our heads from collision with the ground. Our aircraft, a Hudson, was not the best type from which to jump, as it flew fast and had only two propellers, so that as one came out of the door, one was hit by a turbulent slipstream, which was difficult for a novice to ride—also the door was rather small. I should have been No. 1 in our stick, owing to my age and rank, as it is the easiest exit, but I gave up my place to my chief staff officer, Lieut.-Col. Arthur Nicholls, Coldstream Guards, who was tall and angular. He found it awkward to get out of the door quickly as No. 2 and he spoilt the stick. He was always complaining in the ground practice sticks, so I told him to stop bellyaching and go No. 1.

For the first round the instructor jumped on his own 'to prove the air.' He made it look so simple, dressed in shorts and a shirt and no helmet. He made a perfect exit and floated down to make a landing in the circle. Meanwhile the aircraft had circled and was running in to drop our stick. A wobble of the wings to warn us, then a red light by the door. A scream of 'Action stations!' from the dispatcher, followed by a 'Go!' Nicholls was gone and I followed him. I tried so hard to get a good position in the air I straightened up too soon and hit my parachute pack on the top of the door. It was disastrous. The Lockheed's slipstream seized me, hurled me away, legs and arms all over the place. A violent jerk and the 'chute opened. All was peace. The world was going round and round. By the time I had stopped the spin I was down to 100 feet and realised I

was dropping into the circle, where microphones on rods were waiting to stick straight up my harness. I realised the instructor was shouting at me to close my legs and feet and reach up at the webs. He grabbed me as I landed. 'Just you do one more bad exit like that, sir, and off the course you go!' And he meant it.

I sorrowfully collected up my 'chute and caught the truck which ran back to the airfield straight away for the next jump. Luckily, I realised what had happened, and the next exit was perfect, no twists, and lots of time to look all round to make a good landing.

Night landings were rather more difficult, and I found them a strain, probably because I did not splice the mainbrace before going aloft. There was no moon—we were guided by three fires on the Dropping Zone.

As we became airborne and climbed, I realised that the engines were shedding hot carbon past the fuselage. I got quite perturbed, thinking my 'chute might catch fire, until I realised that the conditions were the same as for day jumping, except that it was dark and the carbon showed up. Being early in the stick I did not see much of the fires as we drifted away from them. The air and ground seemed a uniform dark grey mist all round. We were dropped at about 800 feet, and could only tell how close to the ground we were by counting the seconds for the rate of descent. I hit the ground hard, without seeing it, but was unhurt.

I borrowed a car afterwards and went up to Shamus Pollock's house at Nazareth where Margaret Pollock was always glad to rest and refresh officers weary from night parachuting. She told me that her nephew, Billy McLean, in the Scots Greys, had parachuted into some Balkan country, and imagined I was going to do the same thing, and would I look out for him.

Little did she realise that he was in my Mission and I would shortly be meeting him in the mountains in

Chermenika. In fact, he had volunteered to drop into Greece to the British Mission and then walk up into Albania to make contacts and find Dropping Zones to receive personnel and stores. He had had a rough time, and had been put into prison by the Albanians, always suspicious of anyone coming from Greece, but after some days he had been able to establish his identity, contact the leaders, start a training school, move about the country, fight the Italians on several occasions, attend a major political conference and form a reception committee for me.

Next we went to 'The Firm's' school on Mount Carmel to learn about explosives and foreign weapons. Stan, our Polish instructor, was brilliant. There was nothing he did not know about the enemy arms, and what we learnt from him was very useful later on.

I returned to El Maza, for Cairo, again by air, this time a rough trip with a Khamsin wind and three Levantine ladies sadly sick all the way up the Delta.

There was little time left to pack, write last letters and have final medical and dental vettings. At one conference, all four brigadiers for the Balkans were together for the only time. Myers, who had come out of Greece, where he had done such good work and blown the Gorgopotamo bridge; Armstrong for Mihailovitch; Fitzroy Maclean for Tito; and I was to go to Albania. An American Chief of Staff was present to get our demands for American help, both in officers and material. We had a preliminary British conference beforehand. I said that I would prefer to wait until I had been into the country and had seen the conditions before I committed any more British or Americans to the difficulties there. Our Chief of Staff agreed with my view as being prudent. In the big conference, the American Chief of Staff said that American officers were waiting, trained, in the U.S.A. and they would be very disappointed if they were not

employed at once. I said I would take a number of American doctors and medical orderlies, as the British had none available, but unfortunately, the Americans had none available either. I stuck to my point about the remainder, that Albania was a small country and for the time being we had ample British officers and n.c.o.s to do the work. To detail Americans as well would be a waste of effort and would overcrowd the Mission. Fitzroy Maclean found he could take some, as his area of operations was much bigger than mine. I was in close touch with the American, Carlton S. Coon, who, when he was not soldiering, was a professor of the Peabody Museum, Cambridge, Mass. He had a working knowledge of Albania, but before he could be of any use to me he was given an assignment in Sardinia. I do not remember that Myers or Armstrong took any Americans at first, but later on some did join their missions, one of whom from Serbia, Al Seitz, became a firm friend of mine after the war in Greece, when he was Military Attaché at Salonika.

We four brigadiers arranged to keep each other informed of our operations, but when the time came it proved difficult, and Cairo sent us situation reports from our flanks from time to time. At a final Chiefs of Staff conference at G.H.Q., presided over by Major-Gen. Scobie, I was given my orders on going into the field, and was asked if I had any queries. One or two points were cleared up. My main instruction was to back the political party, or parties, which gave evidence of fighting our enemies—I was quite clear on what I had to do. The Chiefs of Staff shook hands, wished me luck, and, I expect, were glad that they were not going themselves.

All my H.Q. staff were not able to go with me, as they had not completed their training. Lieut.-Col. Wheeler had joined me from Khartoum. He had been my subaltern at the Coronation in 1937, when we

lined the route at Piccadilly Circus, safeguarding Eros. He was taking over the appointment of Administration and Quatering, and would be responsible for the housekeeping of my Mission, with the heavy task of supplying the resistance movement, so that the Germans could be fought and defeated. Cpl. Pickering, my bodyguard, had also been with me in Palestine in 1938. He was a brilliant shot, a fine athlete and had an Irish sense of humour—we knew each other well and already had been together in some awkward situations. If the Boche wanted a rough-house he could rely on Pickering to give it to him. Capt. Ensor and Capt. Wright came out by sea, and they had to be trained, together with Capt. Shaw, whom I had found in the Middle East. In them I had a nucleus of officers whom I knew well and could trust for special missions if the need arose. Unfortunately, they were flown in to me by the next moon, by which time the weather had turned bad for dropping. Although several attempts were made to get them in, cloud prevented them being dropped. We could hear them circling above the clouds, but could not see them. In the end they landed a long way to the south. Owing to enemy action and winter coming on, we never joined up, which was disappointing.

My last night in Cairo was spent at Mena House, by the Pyramids. Keeble and a friend joined Maggie and me for dinner. We danced by the same swimming pool in which I had swum as a subaltern twenty years before. Within a few hours I was collecting Nicholls from our section flat on the Pyramids road to fly to Benina, near Benghazi, from Heliopolis.

CHAPTER THREE

IT WAS cold and dark when we reached the control tower. Nicholls went inside to report. He came out with a long face. 'If you've time to spare, travel by air,' he said. 'We were due airborne at six and now the Anson won't start.'

We walked about and chatted, sat in the car and yawned. How many times have I waited on airfields, and always at the most awkward hours?

At 8.30 a.m. we climbed into an old-type Anson and were airborne at last, over some Baltimores parked round the taxi track. Minarets and mosques, especially the Mohammed Ali Mosque, at the Citadel, stood out of the haze.

The Nile showed up with its bridges, and mahelas with their lateen rig were sailing downstream. Zamalek, the residential suburb, looked fresh and cool. In the distance, the Pyramids road, lined with gold mohur trees, stood out. The airfield which had received our Liberator only a few weeks ago passed beneath us. Sand was everywhere.

The air grew bumpy. As he was a bad passenger Nicholls took some air-sick pills and produced a large brown paper bag. I tapped him on the shoulder and shouted, 'You dare!'

We hit the coast about El Alamein, followed it north past Matruh, and landed at El Adem. Fake aircraft still stood around the perimeter. Dust was blowing, and it was hot. We went for a cup of tea while the Anson was being refuelled. The water was brackish and made the tea taste foul. Nicholls was glad to be grounded for a while, but he foolishly drank some

tea, and that was his undoing half-way across Cyrenaica, when we were plunging about over the Italian farmsteads and the red earth. The countryside had not yet been cleared of the spoils of battle; it was amazing how so many tins of various sizes could have been discarded.

As Benina came into view, the airfield buildings looked badly smashed up, and the ground was marked with bomb craters everywhere.

Benghazi showed up with its white buildings, but we were circling and landing too soon to see much of it.

As we drove along the road, the shacks were painted with Italian signs and huge 'DUCES' dominated everything, but Mussolini and his reign were just ceasing to exist and it all seemed rather ridiculous.

Tocra proved a barren place about half a mile from the seashore. On one side of the road was a compound filled with dumps and stores surrounded by a barbed-wire fence with a packing shed for parachutes, tall and unusual. Inside were hanging 'chutes of all colours and types for use with men and stores. By hanging they are kept dry, and as they are not packed until the last moment it ensured a safe opening. Accidents are said to have occurred from 'candle-ing,' or failure of the 'chute to open, caused by static electricity in damp silk. The dumps and stores were mostly worked by Yugoslavs with the idea that they would take care in packing, knowing that the stores would be used to liberate their country.

The Paymaster had a small field cashier's office which had the romantic task of dispatching gold to us in the field—the cells of the containers which carried the gold were painted pink for easy recognition. The partisans, unfortunately, were able to recognise the pink cells as easily and quickly as we were, with the result that some of the Paymaster's dispatches did not reach their destination.

On the east side of the road was the mess and our tents. I was given a 180-lb. tent and an orderly. The tent was pitched with others in an open space, but as big angry-looking clouds were blowing up from the south-west the soldier went to work digging a good trench round the tent in case of a downpour, a good precaution, as a tremendous storm drowned the whole camp during the night.

The mess was rough, uncomfortable and dirty; it was used by officers and n.c.o.s together, the only occasion I have ever known this to happen. The intention was to let teams going into the field get together as soon as possible. To be together in the field is one thing—numbers are then small, and rank distinctions cannot be enforced—but to have put us together in Tocra was a mistake, and made it awkward for both officers and n.c.o.s. The camp was very crowded at this time. Officers going into Greece had been held back owing to difficulty with the Greek partisans and were waiting to be told 'Go.' Then bad weather over the Adriatic had held up sorties for Yugoslavia; some aircraft making several unsuccessful attempts to get in had returned to Tocra, shedding their stores on to the airfield before landing.

Meantime, fresh officers and n.c.o.s were arriving from Cairo. The camp became unbearably full. Luckily we had not long to wait, and after four days we were away. The atmosphere there was tense. Everybody in the mess was keyed up to a high degree. Would the pilot drop you at the right place? Would the landing be a good one, not on rocks nor in a forest? Would there be a friendly reception committee and not the enemy waiting for you? This type of question was bound to be uppermost in all thoughts. Each night aircraft roared away to Dropping Zones all over the Balkans, and in the early hours they returned. The weather was better in some places

than others. We depended on the moon to see us in. It was already getting late, and only a few more nights were left, or we should have to wait until next month.

Most of my Mission were at Tocrá waiting for dispatch to various places in Albania, allowing me to get to know them better, and talk things over with them. I gave orders that particular attention was to be paid to personal appearance and dress, the fact that we were in the field was to be no excuse for getting scruffy. Times of hardship or danger would come when shaving would be impossible, but at the first opportunity a shave was to be had. We experienced this hardship for about eight days at H.Q., when it was impossible to shave, as we were on the run in the mountains. But we got rid of the stubble at the first chance. I have never understood why a soldier need look like a brigand when he is on special operations. Nicholls, being a Coldstreamer, agreed with me completely, and saw that my orders were obeyed.

On the last day that I was in the camp a Lockheed Hudson flew in. It had brought from England Major-Gen. Colin Gubbins, who was head of our special organisation. He came and sat in my tent and talked about all sorts of things. It had been decided to replace Brigadier Keeble. Who was to take his place was not then known. As Nicholls had been his chief of staff in London, the general had thought of putting him into Cairo, but I begged him not to upset our staff just as we were about to set forth. Nicholls had volunteered for the field, and would be furious if he became 'chairborne' in Cairo. He and I were getting on so well together it would be a pity to part us. General Gubbins agreed.

He flew off the next morning to what we both knew would be an unpleasant and unexpected meeting with Keeble. Nicholls was delighted that there had been no change of plan. 'I would never look myself in the

face if I spent the whole war in some safe static job,' he said. 'For over a year now I have been trying to get into the field, and having been chief staff officer at home I know full well what that means.'

But if I had known then what I knew later, I would not have taken Nicholls with me, as his physique was not robust enough to take the heavy strain.

The last day was spent in packing up our kit, loading the aircraft, and seeing that all the containers were fitted to the bomb-racks. We attended the briefing of the crews in the squadron tent. The pilot, Flt.-Lieut. Forrester, agreed with me that if he could not drop us for any reason he would land in Italy, and not fly all the way back to Tocra. He would then be ready to hop the Adriatic at the first sign of good weather.

We said we were ready to do a day drop from Italy, but this was ruled out owing to the danger of day fighters, and the risk of the *Luftwaffe* locating our Dropping Zone and Headquarters.

Forrester said if all went well he would drop me at 2200 hours (10 p.m.) at Biza, in the Chermenika Mountains. He knew the country, and his crew had made a sketch of the Dropping Zone from the last time they had been there. I looked at it and saw three mountains marked with the suggested line of approach. Underneath was written an instruction to the pilot, 'Climb quickly, left-handed, or else——.'

An hour behind us was to come Nicholls, flown by Wing-Cmdr. Blackburn, who had given way as leader as Forrester knew the country better. My aircraft had the code name of 'Colour 6,' and Nicholls' 'Colour 7.' Both were four-engined Halifaxes.

When the briefing was over we went back to our tents and changed into battledress. This was nothing short of torture, the sun was blazing hot and the sweat poured down us and soaked us, but it had to be done to get rid of our khaki drill and to fit our parachutes.

To make it worse, a thick flying suit went over the battledress before the parachute harness could be worn. All this because we were being dropped into mountains 7,000 feet high, where the winter frosts were already heavy. The R.A.F. sergeant fitted my harness so tight that it bruised my thighs in the drop. 'It's a good thing to have it nice and tight,' he kept saying. Each harness and 'chute was placed in a large bag, and labelled to avoid mistakes.

Now everything was ready, except food. Sandwiches and hot coffee were made ready for the flight. Each of us had a huge coloured Thermos. We ate a high tea in the grim dining tent and thanked our stars it was the last meal in it. My batman brought me a spare towel and shaving kit, in case we had to land in Italy, to save unpacking in the aircraft. The truck was there. Chesshire, my cheerful sapper officer, and Sgt. Melrose, my signals sergeant, climbed in with me, carrying flying suits and parachutes.

In my pockets were a torch, a Commando knife, a map of the country round the Dropping Zone, a flask of rum, a first-aid outfit, some biscuits, plus an automatic pistol and ammunition. A body belt held a number of gold sovereigns, enough for emergency should one be dropped astray somewhere. Our 'chutes and harness we left in their bags—time enough to put them on at the last moment. There was no need to fly for nearly four hours in cramped surroundings in that harness. A dispatcher was there to help us when the time came to put on our 'chutes.

We were at the briefing tent again, to find Forrester and his crew waiting for us. 'Do you want to drop first, sir, with your two chaps, or will you wait till the containers and panniers have gone down? It means circling several times before you go,' Forrester said. I asked Chesshire and Sgt. Melrose what they would like to do.

'Let's go first, sir,' said Chesshire. 'If we circle several times the rum will wear off.'

'What about you, Melrose?'

'First, sir, please, then I'll be on the ground to collect my set when it comes down.'

'All right, Forrester, drop us first, then the stores. I'll lead the way, followed by Major Chesshire, Sgt. Melrose last.'

'Right, sir. You'll feel me steady her for the run in. What height would you like to be dropped at?'

'Would 800 feet suit you? It will give us time to collect our wits, correct spins and make a good landing. I don't want to prejudice your climb left or else!'

There was a general laugh all round. 'I think I can manage that without pranging the mountain. Eight hundred feet it is. Please don't waste time getting out. You should be on the ground at about 2200 hours. Another thing, when we're taking off I want everybody forward until we get to 1,000 feet, we're pretty heavily laden. Everybody all set? I think we'd better get aboard.'

The flight and the drop were soon over. Colour 6 had hardly gone before partisans ran on to the ground with mules to collect the stores. Parachutes were detached, and with much shouting and whacking of mules, all the gear was piled on the edge of the Dropping Zone.

Already in the distance aircraft engines could be heard. Colour 7 was approaching. Right overhead she came, and winked down at us. Smiley replied and shouted for the fires to be lighted again. Flames and sparks shot up from three great piles of logs and brushwood. The sound of the engines grew louder as the wing-commander circled down on us, until he was running in, and the aircraft showed up against the sky.

Suddenly four parachutes developed one after the

2.
SUPPLY DROP



3. SORTING A DROP



4.
KADRI HOJA



5. COOKERETTES COOKING

other, and we could just see the white of the canopies as they descended.

The partisans rushed forward to greet the new arrivals. Presently Nicholls arrived, followed by Palmer, Smith and Trooper Button. More introductions to Smiley and McLean, and much excited chattering.

Colour 7 ran in twice more, dropped her stores and flew off to North Africa. We waited till all the containers had been collected. A guard would look after them until morning, when they would be checked, brought up to the camp and unpacked. The Germans were not yet penetrating into the mountains, so we could take our time.

We walked the half mile to the camp. It was sited in a beautiful setting, on the hill at the end of the plain, with beech woods running down to the valley. Three mountains towered above us. The trees, bushes and grass were covered thickly with hoar frost. The flying suits were a blessing, though they are not designed for wear in climbing hills.

Having reached the hut built by foresters out of beechwood planks, we fed on a rough table running the length of the hut. It was a most exhilarating moment, to have landed safely in an enemy-occupied country, and to find everything strange and rough, Albanians cooking for us, staring at us.

The local Partisan leader, Kadri Hoja, a lean, fallow-faced man, with dark flashing eyes and a drooping moustache, hearing that we had dropped, came to pay his respects and eat an enormous supper.

McLean had found an excellent interpreter cum liaison officer in Frederick Nosi, whose uncle, Lef Nosi, was head of the quisling Government and collaborating with the Germans in Tirana, the capital. Frederick had been taught English by Mrs. Hasluck, who was a great friend of Lef Nosi's.

When the resistance started, Frederick had belonged to the Ball Kombetar (National Front) Party, but, finding they were not very active against the Germans he transferred his allegiance to the L.N.C., Levitzia Nacional Clirimtare (National Liberation Movement), from whom McLean had borrowed him. Through Frederick, we arranged with Kadri Hoja to bring mules to carry away the arms, explosives and clothing the Halifaxes had dropped.

Kadri then departed, well pleased with himself. He was the first leader in Albania to contact the English general. McLean had decided I must be called General, as Brigadier in Albanian, French and Italian conveyed a Police Corporal, and General-Major is the German equivalent of Brigadier, the rank I held.

By now it was two in the morning. We were exhausted. From heat to cold, with four hours' flying, a night descent, a good drop of raki and mountain air—our heads were reeling.

Albanian boys brought in stacks of beech leaves and twigs to make our beds. Covered with Army blankets we lay on the floor and slept fitfully. It was bitterly cold and very uncomfortable.

We went out early next morning to collect the stores. Everything had arrived safely, except one wireless transmitter which was missing, and two batteries which were broken. It was a magnificent morning, frosty and sunny. We set the camp boys to making us huts from beech logs and branches, shaped not unlike a large bell tent, with a centre pole and a thick roof of leaves. Over it were spread two parachute canopies of camouflage colours, which kept out light rain only; when it poured, drips started to come in everywhere, so that the only remedy was to cover up the bed and one's clothes with groundsheets. The bed was also home-made from branches driven into the

ground. Parachute cord formed the springs, rather like an Indian charpoy. The mattress was made from the sides of the rhomboids, which protected articles such as charging-engines from damage when dropped from the air. To keep warm in bed it was best to change into one's flying suit at sundown and wear it for supper, then to hop straight into bed with flying suit and balaclava cap. The parachute cords of silk were most useful for all sorts of handy jobs: very strong, they would tie up loads on mules, make clothes-lines for drying, would keep one's trousers up—there was no end to their uses. With them I erected a canopy of groundsheets over my bed to keep off the rain.

In the afternoon, Chesshire and I set off to reconnoitre the plain for possible landing strips, on which, at best, we hoped to get in a Dakota, at worst, a Lysander. If a Halifax could cross the Dropping Zone at 800 feet we could not see why a landing could not be made by smaller aircraft—there was ample approach and room enough to take off. But when we came to walk the course there were difficulties. In parts the ground was soft and marshy, and the stream cut across the driest and highest end. We decided that a Lysander would be possible, with some work on the runway, but to land anything as big as a Dakota would mean taking risks. As Lysanders were not then being used, our plan did not seem feasible, especially as winter and snow were approaching, so we reluctantly gave up the idea.

Parachuting is all very well, but it is too 'one-way.' We needed to be able to 'fly away Peter and fly away Paul' in times of emergency, sickness and necessity. We then began to think of Lake Ochrid, on the Bulgarian border, using a seaplane, but that was not too easy, as the lake was patrolled by motor-boat, but it did have possibilities, given the right type of seaplane.

We had news during the day of the arrival of

another aircraft that night. It brought Hare, the staff captain, Bulman, Smyth, Michael Lis, a Pole working on the escape route from Poland, Sgt. Chisholm, our chief clerk, and Cpl. Huxtable. They arrived rather late, and it was two o'clock in the morning when we jumped out of bed to greet them. They all landed safely, but Michael, the Pole, had been puzzled by the look of the mist, as I had been, and convinced that he was going into water, undid his harness, saying 'Bloody bad luck, Michael, into water.' Luckily he did not let go of his harness and parachute, and made a normal landing. The new arrivals were fed and bedded down, with their kit left till morning.

McLean and I departed on a reconnaissance from an observation point of the country to the south, taking with us Frederick and some locals. It started with a boar hunt, but we did not see a pig. The reconnaissance finished, we spent some hours discussing local politics with Frederick. I was learning that although I had thought that my task would be entirely military, in fact, it was going to be affected greatly by politics whether I liked it or not. In Cairo I had been told to back any political party which would fight the Italians or Germans, and it had sounded very simple. In Albania I was to find the whole matter very complex and difficult.

Of the officers now at Biza, at my Headquarters, only half were to remain with me, and the remainder were to go out to train and fight with the partisans. Before they went I was anxious to start some activity round H.Q., so a party set out to reconnoitre and cut the road between El Basan and Struga.

Palmer, Chesshire, Nicholls and Michael Lis moved down to Orenje. Here they took luncheon with Kadri Hoja, who as already mentioned was the Partisan leader in this area.



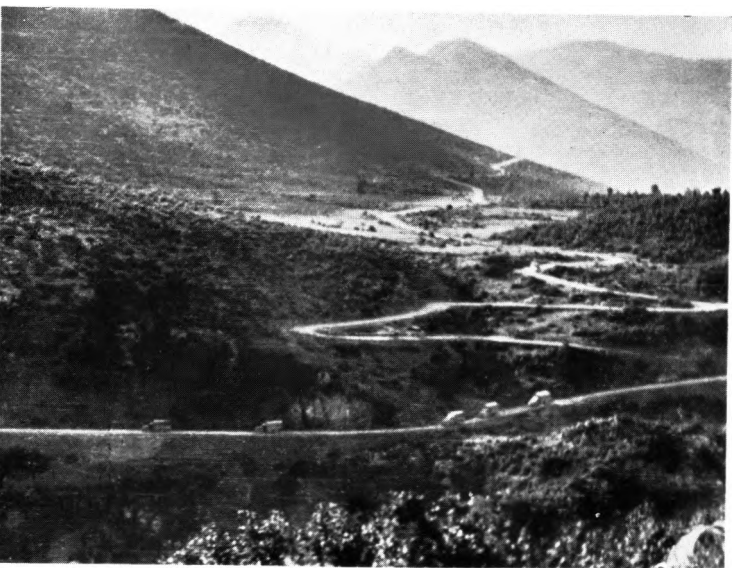
6. BILLY McLEAN, FREDERICK NOSI AND BABA FAJA



7. LOADED MULES



8. MOUNTAINOUS COUNTRY BETWEEN BIZA AND LABINOT



9. AN ENEMY CONVOY

Kadri had lunching with him a Bektashi priest, Baba Faja, a cheerful, bearded man with a humorous twinkle in his eye, who loved bursting into song on every occasion, hands on paunch, swaying to and fro.

In the afternoon they headed south and made a long tiring march over narrow tracks which were frequently cut by mountain streams. Darkness had fallen before they arrived at Labinot, a village on the high ground above El Basan, much used by the partisans as a transit camp and a meeting place for conferences. Their reception was rather chilly as the locals did not appreciate having the Germans stirred up in their vicinity. Having slept and fed they continued towards their target but had to leave Michael halfway as he was still exhausted after the long trek of the day before. Michael said that a horse was more in his line, as he had been in the Polish cavalry, but Hare, as a British cavalryman, gave him short shrift and said that was no excuse for falling out on the line of march.

The mountainside fell steeply down to the road which ran along the bottom of the narrow valley. The three officers cast round until they found a good position from which they could safely watch the road and pick out possible targets for demolition. It is always tempting to watch enemy traffic on a road within range, especially dispatch riders on motor-cycles and staff officers in cars simply asking to be shot up. Nicholls wagged his trigger finger at Chesshire and grinned. They examined the road in detail with their field glasses before climbing up the side of the mountain to eat their lunch on their way back to Labinot.

We found the American K rations very good for this type of work, as they were packed in neat cardboard boxes, sealed with wax paper which kept the wet out, and were divided into the various meals, with coffee

and soft drink soluble powders, sweets, cigarettes and matches. Empty ration boxes were generally left on the site of our sabotage exploits to induce the Germans to put the blame on us instead of wrecking the nearest Albanian homestead or village. Back in Labiot our party made ready for blowing the bridge the following day. The partisans seemed none too keen on the venture and refused to send a covering or carrying party to help our officers, who, however, were not to be deterred.

At midday they moved off with the mule loaded with explosives. The plan was to lead the mule as far forward as possible before changing the loads over to rucksacks which would have to be humped down the steep mountainside. It was a sure-footed animal on rocky and rough ground, and care had been taken by Hare in loading it up. It was possible to choose a halting point well down the hillside, where the explosives and stores could be sorted out before the mule was sent to wait at the rendezvous till the early hours of the morning. Tarsi, the muleman, and a small boy who had acted as guide went with it.

The three officers, in spite of the greatest care, made a lot of noise as they approached the road, rocks bounding down the gullies whenever they were dislodged. The noise attracted no attention and they were able to carry their heavy loads down the rocky slopes to within fifty yards of the road without being seen. Probably the noise of the passing traffic covered them.

It was obvious from their new position that the bridge they had selected as a target from the mountain-side above was out of the question for attack. It was of heavy concrete construction and would have needed a lot of work on it and a large amount of explosive to destroy it. Chesshire was most disappointed and started to reconnoitre for a smaller target. He soon

found a large culvert west of the bridge. This looked as if a successful blow would cause a long delay while repairs were made, and judging by the amount of military traffic passing, would be of great nuisance value. While it was dusk a large convoy started to pass, armoured cars, staff cars, three-ton lorries in very good condition and well sheeted down. Nicholls crawled to within three yards of the road to try to get identifications, but the dust and the failing light defeated him. Over two hundred vehicles passed before a move across the road could be made to inspect the culvert closely. Supper was enjoyed beside the target despite the passing of several cars. Chesshire then moved his explosives and gear under the culvert and got to work fixing the charges. The moon had not yet risen and it was too dark to climb the mountain-side quickly without risk of someone being seriously hurt, so four hours' rest were taken. Chesshire then made a last check of all his charges and saw that they were satisfactorily linked up.

When everybody was ready the fuses were lighted. Nicholls said, 'Let's go,' and the three officers ran as hard as they could to take cover.

At midnight there was a sheet of flame, a loud explosion which echoed and reverberated across the valley, while shattered fragments of girders and lumps of stone crashed into the bushes and bounced off the rocks.

In the moonlight the saboteurs climbed steadily for two hours, breathing heavily and sweating with exertion, until they reached the farmhouse where the Albanians were waiting with the mule. The bang, they said, had been a good one.

The party reached Labinot as dawn was breaking.

Meanwhile, the rest of us had busied ourselves looking for a winter H.Q., as we were afraid that the weather would take a sudden turn and trap us at

Biza in inadequate huts with all tracks snowbound. We wanted to stay there as long as possible as it was on the edge of a good dropping ground well known to the R.A.F. and we were dependent on air supply to help build up the resistance movement before the spring. At 6,000 feet it was already becoming cold at night. McLean suggested that we should go down to Shengerj (St. George), a village on the track beneath the Tirana mountain road, to look at that first, so we rode there with Frederick to interpret for us.

We looked at some large rambling houses which could be turned into warm, comfortable headquarters, with stabling for the horses and plenty of fodder and grass. It was within easy reach of Biza should air drops be possible. But there were obvious disadvantages, the main one being that wireless communication with Cairo would be almost impossible, as the village was in a valley surrounded by mountains, which would screen any wireless set. From a security point of view the mountain road would allow any sudden enemy raid to take us by surprise from three different directions; we would be caught on the low ground with the enemy in position on the high ground above us and escape blocked in every direction.

So Shengerj was ruled out and we decided to try for better security and good wireless touch on higher ground away from the road.

The reconnaissance finished, we were entertained to an evening meal by our hosts, which dragged on until a late hour, with long discussions on politics, in which I took no part as I was new to the country, and left McLean to air his views. I could see that Frederick was a good interpreter, and we were lucky to have him.

In the morning I made the unpleasant discovery that Albanians do not take breakfast, going without food

until midday, when they eat a good meal and then wait until night falls for a big supper, generally a vast quantity of bread and meat, which is tough and stringy as it is cooked too soon after being killed. Toothpicks were used in a delicate manner, with one cupped hand shielding the other from the public gaze as it prodded between the teeth. I resolved that we must take some K breakfast rations on future visits to Albanian households and brew up for ourselves on a Primus.

As we rode up the hill, hunger was staved off with bunches of grapes plucked from vines growing beside the path. Even the horses snatched at them.

On return to camp we found that four of our muleteers had been arrested for ransacking our huts in our absence and stealing clothes and other articles. They were brought before me. Having heard the evidence, I ordered that they should be sent to the Partisan Brigade for trial and I told them that I would recommend that the death sentence should be passed, followed by immediate execution.

As they were Albanians working with the partisans, there was no chance of this sentence being passed, but I wanted it to be known that I took a serious view of stealing. Had I shown any leniency, an orgy of theft would have taken place and none of our belongings would ever have been safe.

They were duly tried and acquitted, but the gesture had been made, and the Partisan Brigade knew better than to send them back to duty with us. This was the first of many similar incidents and we were evidently regarded as fair game. The Mediterranean countries seem to abound in petty thieves, 'Klepsi, klepsi,' as the Greeks call it, being experienced wherever one goes.

Having dealt with the muleteers, I made a tour of the camp to see how everything was going. As the hub

of affairs, the officers' mess hut was always a scene of activity. The office and store for the camp lay at one end of it behind a partition, and here the staff captain, Hare, was taking over from Smiley before he went to Egypt. They were checking the stores that had arrived by air and were having lists made by the chief clerk, Sgt. Chisholm. Outside, a crowd of partisans from Martanesh were receiving battledress and boots and were cleaning the grease from weapons. Their leader, Baba Faja, was counting carefully a pile of rifles and Sten guns before he gave Smiley a receipt for them. The mules ready to carry away the load were cropping the grass, while their leaders crowded round to see what was happening, in the embarrassing way that peasants have with their curious stare. A stranger is a never-ending source of interest to them whatever he is doing.

Across the plateau, a mule train was returning from El Basan, where it had been on a shopping expedition, running the gauntlet of the German garrison, bringing back food, vegetables, fruit, walnuts, chickens, eggs, petrol tins full of red wine, paraffin, petrol, candles, petrol lamps, a saddle and bridle and other oddments. Hare saw everything into the stores as fast as he could unload it and went into the shopping accounts with Frederick with large packets of paper money, leks and napoleons. Korca, who conducted these expeditions, had bought himself a new white sweater out of the shopping money, and there was an argument about that for a while before he recounted bazaar gossip and the rumours of German intentions and movements.

Sgt. Melrose interrupted with an urgent signal just received which needed decoding—it might be a warning order for an aircraft drop that night. Hare gave an order to the mulemen to build the fires in anticipation.

Luncheon was being prepared in the kitchen, but Guri, the cook, had come over to see the boys had laid the table properly on the beechwood planks and had put an extra parachute container next to me as a seat for Baba Faja. We could entertain quite well in those early days when air supply was good and local purchases possible.

I went round the back of the mess hut to the officers' lines. We would need two more huts for visiting officers coming for orders; the four huts we had already were not enough, especially when anyone was sick or resting.

The sergeants' lines and mess were detached from ours but both messes fed from the same kitchen and had the same food and drink.

The building of the oven from mud bricks was nearly completed, and the Italian baker said that he would be ready to start baking loaves soon. The bread that we had been having up to now had been made in the kitchen and was rough and apt to scour one. Someone had set fire to the kitchen by mistake and a new one had been built that morning with logs and branches. It looked as if that would not last long either, judging by the size of the fires burning in it and the sparks flying into the leaf roof. A good smell of roasting meat came from a carcass on a wooden spit.

Next to the kitchen were the Italian lines, the mechanics' shop, where the engines for charging the wireless batteries were overhauled, the motor-cycles repaired and numerous small jobs done. The barber was cutting hair and stopping to talk, with his scissors and comb describing circles in the air for emphasis. A cobbler was hammering nails into a newly-arrived pair of British marching boots. Poor chaps, they were glad to be working and given regular food, it was better than being marched away to captivity

in Germany, though it might be a long time before they crossed the Adriatic to their homes.

In the wireless tent on the hill above us we could hear the set sending a shrill message. It was Trayhorn's watch, and reception was good, signals coming strong and clear. Our operators were received by the same men every watch in Cairo and were so used to each other's work that they could tell who was on the set at the other end from the way the key was pressed.

There were patches of bad weather when touch was lost through atmospherics or sometimes when our set was located in an unsuitable area, screened by hills or trees, but on the whole our signallers gave reliable service in all weathers and at all hours. The small sets they were using stood up to the rough conditions very well, but the pedal chargers, from a static bicycle frame, which had to be used when petrol had run out, were cursed by everybody; they were hard work, uncomfortable, slow to charge and made a piercing whine which could be heard a long way off.

Trayhorn was taking a long message, his earphones over his beret, writing at speed, so I left him and walked over to the animal transport lines. As I passed the sheepfold, two huge Albanian wolfhounds, not unlike Borzois, rushed out barking and snarling.

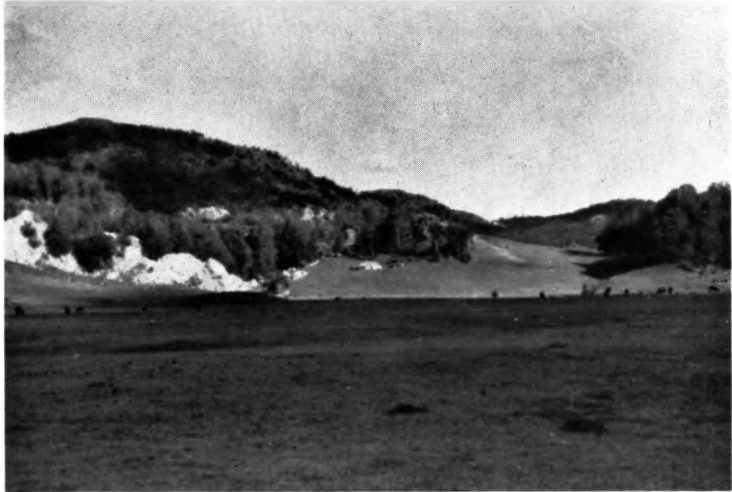
The horse and mule lines were growing in size as the peasants brought in animals to sell, many of them Argentine mules, ex-Italian Army. The vet, Tessio, was examining some as I came up. The mule trains were a heavy responsibility, liable to be seen from the air by the slow Junkers transport planes which flew low over us on their way to Tirana, so grazing had to be confined to non-flying weather. Large amounts of fodder had to be provided to keep them at work heavily laden over steep mountain tracks. A section of muleteers was needed to water, feed, groom and

10. THE BRIGADIER
READY FOR A JUMP



11. GIRL PARTISANS AT H.Q.





12. BIZA PLAIN DROPPING ZONE

Views from ground level (above) and from mountain side (below)



load them; the ponies had to be shod and were constantly casting shoes on the rocky paths. They were a liability, but we could not have planned without them, as Biza, being a good Dropping Zone, was a centre for distributing stores quickly in many directions, and we were looking ahead to the spring.

We were anxious to get under cover in winter quarters before the snow fell. Apart from the worries, we enjoyed having the mules about the place as they are great comedians and always playing the fool. I liked the smell of their lines, with the farrier scorching a hoof and the vet treating ailments. The saddler fitted the new saddle and bridle to my horse and took them away to be cleaned.

It was nearly lunchtime, so I finished by calling at Frederick's hut, where he was listening to a broadcast from Tirana by the German-controlled station. He spent several hours each night monitoring the radio stations in the countries all round us, as he spoke some four languages and knew three others well enough to understand the gist of the programme.

Baba Faja, the bearded priest, was singing in the mess, with a mug of red wine on the table before him.

As I arrived with Frederick, luncheon was served.

CHAPTER FOUR

WHILE WE were away, a third party had gone to the west to find if the road-bridges had been destroyed. Smith, Bulman and Corsair, an officer who did not belong to my Mission but was in the country on a special task, went beyond Shengerj towards Tirana, arriving at the H.Q. of the Partisan Datje Battalion at Priske; they were billeted about a mile away. While Smith continued on his reconnaissance, Corsair and Bulman remained in the billet. It was a quiet night. Smith returned, having found two bridges destroyed and a third partially. The other two officers were parting with him here, on their way to a location nearer to the coast. They had to be helped across the road by the Partisan Brigade.

About sunset, as the three officers were meeting about a hundred yards from the billet, shooting started. A partisan came running to say that the Germans were attacking the house. Smith, with the others, took cover. Confused shooting followed, the Germans using mortars and Hotchkiss guns. Smith found the battalion commander of the Datje Battalion and organised three patrols, led by our officers, which turned the Boche out. The house was undamaged and the wireless set undiscovered, having been hastily hidden beneath the straw in the cellar by the house-owner, together with all weapons and other kit. The enemy patrols withdrew, so Smith and the other two spent the night in the house, undeterred. Smith then returned to H.Q. while Bulman and Corsair crossed the road. The following day some 500 Germans raided Priske and burnt the house that had sheltered them.

As the Boche were said to be advancing up the road leading to our camp, I ordered out a fighting patrol to stop their advance, and had the other end of the road, leading from El Basan, closed with a minefield, which was guarded by a British patrol. The fighting patrol was hampered by the bad discipline of the Italians and partisans, so Palmer sent them back to H.Q. and pressed on to Priske with the British elements only. No enemy were met. The Datje Battalion said they had withdrawn, and produced more details of the German attack, said to be 800 to 1,000 strong, supported by 88-mm. guns. Palmer decided to return to H.Q., leaving Chesshire to do more demolitions to block the road leading up to us.

From these odd operations we discovered that the partisans were far from reliable, and that if we wanted anything done quickly and properly we would have to do it ourselves. We were also beginning to learn that we could not trust local information and reports. I felt that, even if the reports were unreliable, it was better to act on them rather than risk surprise, but, in fact, we could have ignored every situation report we received and come to no harm. Continued alarms and excursions occurred all round us—flares and shooting, which could only be answered by sending out patrols to see what it was all about, but the patrols never did find anything definite, and we suspected that stray shepherds were responsible.

At H.Q., Nicholls always saw to it that everyone had a pack ready for a quick get-out, and that one wireless station was ready for loading. The horses and mules were driven in from the Dropping Zone, and thirty of them were picketed and saddled. With woods and tracks all round us we could be attacked with little warning if a long-range patrol was brave enough to come into the mountains. We studied all the exits from the plain, in case this should happen.

I had been having long talks with McLean and Smiley, who had been giving me the benefit of their experience. Neal, a R.A.F. Squadron-Leader, had come down from the north to report to me for further orders. We had a long walk through the beech woods while we talked. On a path covered by autumn leaves we found a salamander, a beautiful gold and black lizard, well camouflaged in the leaves and shadows.

From these talks I was building up gradually an up-to-date picture of the situation facing me. It seemed that it would be best to send McLean and Smiley out of the country to give the headquarters at Cairo and at home our position. Both deserved a rest after a strenuous six months. In fact, they recommended to me that every officer and n.c.o. should be withdrawn after that time to rest and refit before returning to the field; some might not wish to go in again after experiencing the disappointments and difficulties of this type of soldiering.

We had already organised, in November 1943, a service for getting them out of the country by starting a sea base south of Valona, known as 'Sea View,' which has been well described by Anthony Quayle in his book *Eight Hours from England*. Quayle had relieved Field, who had run a Dropping Zone right under the noses of the Italians, and had received stores on it from the air until the Italians had camped on it. When we had occupied the heel of Italy, the Navy began a service to us with motor-launches whenever the weather was suitable, coming over from and returning to Italy the same night. A naval officer, Sandy Glenn, who was attached to my Mission, organised the M.L. service, and it continued to run safely for a year. The fact that it was so little interfered with by the Germans was due to the base being covered by a mountain range which ran between the sea and the main road. Only occasional patrols visited the area,

but they never attacked or discovered the cove in which 'Sea View' lay. During that time there were evacuated over a thousand Italians, one hundred wounded Albanians, over fifty of my Mission, twenty-four Allied airmen (mostly American who had baled out) and a few Long-Range Desert Group and Commandos.

It was at my H.Q. at Biza that we heard from my Albanian interpreter, Frederick, that an American aircraft containing many doctors and nurses to help the partisans had landed the day before at Berat. Why had I not told them they were coming? I laughed, and said it was a Balkan rumour as usual—that there was nothing to it. But on our next wireless schedule from Cairo came a top priority signal saying that an American aircraft had force-landed at Berat in a thunderstorm. On board were two pilots, fifteen enlisted men and thirteen nurses. I was to take all steps to rescue them and get them to Italy by sea as soon as possible.

The partisans were quicker informed than the Mission on this occasion. How they transmitted the news so quickly I did not know, for the Germans controlled posts and telegrams, there were no rail nor flying facilities, roads were blocked, and we were a long way from Berat, where the incident had taken place, with difficult mountain country intervening. It is possible that Italian wireless stations had been captured after the Italian armistice and the partisans were making use of them, but transmission difficulties within the mountains were great, and there were risks of interception. One would have thought that our liaison officer near Berat could inform me, via Cairo, of the incident before any bush telegraph of the partisans could do so.

The aircraft had been bound for Italy when it was forced down by the weather on November 27th. The

crew and passengers made a hasty exit from the plane as the Boche entered Berat. Three of the nurses, sheltering in the house of a rich Albanian merchant, were cut off from the remainder and had to stay behind in hiding. The main party was guarded by the partisans at Dobrushe, and here Capt. Duffy contacted them. It was a big party to move about the country without being discovered. Food was difficult to get for such a large number. The nurses' shoes and clothes were not suited for rough mountain paths. Nevertheless, by mid-December the party reached Shepr, and went on to Progonat. Duffy then tried to get through to the coast by himself, but failed owing to German troop concentrations. While he was absent, the American pilot signalled Cairo that it was possible to rescue them by air pick-up from Gjinokaster airfield. Duffy on his return signalled that he could only give a time for the pick-up when the weather improved. On December 29th, although Duffy had not given any confirmation, the American Air Force attempted the pick-up with a Wellington and two Dakotas, supported by thirty Lightning fighters. They circled the airfield for nearly an hour, but were given no signals from the ground, as German troops had entered Gjinokaster. The nurses were waiting on the foothills for aircraft to land to carry them off, and were very disappointed. It was then decided that no further attempt should be made unless Duffy asked for it.

Instead, the party made for the coast, and reached it on January 8th. They were evacuated by sea the following night to Bari in Italy. Great credit is due to these American girls for the fortitude they showed throughout the ordeal. Duffy did well in conducting them safely through the mountains in the middle of winter. The three nurses who remained cut off at Berat did not get back to Italy for another two months, when they were driven to Valona in a car by an

13. THE BRIGADIER
AT BIZA



14. 'SEA VIEW'



15. SMILEY SAYS GOODBYE TO FANNY



16. FREDERICK NOSI, BRIGADIER DAVIES, RAMADAN & McLEAN

This photograph of the conference appeared in 'Picture Post'

Albanian of the Ball Kombetar Party. From there they were able to reach safely our sea base at 'Sea View.'

McLean and Smiley had given me all the useful knowledge they had of the country and the people. It was time for them to go out. I do not think that they were sorry to go. They had learnt, as we all learnt in turn, that the Albanians, after a time, are very aggravating people to deal with, whatever type they are and wherever they come from. So, one afternoon, they loaded into the car, which we had bought for running about quickly on the mountain road, and departed to Labinot on the first stage of their journey. In due course Cairo signalled to me that they had arrived safely, via 'Sea View,' and had gone to England to give their reports first-hand. While there they had a good article on Albania printed in *Picture Post*, illustrated with photos they had taken. The influence of picture papers with local colour was very great. Although a small country, Albania liked to be in the world Press, and to feel important.

At Biza we were slowly sorting ourselves out before we really got to grips with the two main political parties. We now had representative liaison officers in most parts of the country, so that we could rely on their reports of the situation. Palmer and Smith had gone to the south-east, Smyth with Neal to the north-west, exploring the possibilities of flying boats landing on Lake Scutari with arms and personnel. Riddle and Simcox had landed north-east of us, in the Dibra area, and had linked up with Flying-Officer Hands. Kemp and Seymour were in the Pesa country with Myslim Pesa, one of the best guerrilla leaders. Farther south, Tilman, well known as a mountaineer, was with the partisans. Bulman had gone to the west.

We had two unfortunate crashes of Halifaxes

bringing in officers and n.c.o.s. One hit the mountain tops near Valona while circling to make its drop and, crashing, caught fire and was burnt out. The other, coming in over Greece, caught fire in the air and crashed. In these two disasters we lost four officers, two signallers, and an n.c.o.

Several more officers and n.c.o.s were waiting to come in. I was anxious to get Wheeler, who was to complete the supply side of the Mission. He made several attempts to reach us by air, but failed through bad weather. With him was Cpl. Pickering, my body-guard. We could hear them circling overhead, but a thin layer of cloud well above us held the pilot off, although he would have been quite safe coming down through it if he had known. In the end it was decided to drop them farther south and let us link up as best we could. The winter had set in with a vengeance by then, however, and long marches were impossible. Wheeler, Layzell, Ensor, Wright and Shaw all reached the south, but, through the course of events, did not reach Mission H.Q. Soon Kemp and Seymour were mixed up in the fighting in the Pesa country, when the Germans made a big drive to wipe out the Partisan influence there. Both made their way up to me in Chermenika. Kemp I decided to send east to Kossova, to increase our influence in that area and give me information of what was happening there. Hands went up to the north, where he wrecked the Kan chrome mines, with Sgt. Brandrick and Cpl. Clifton, destroying the bucket-way, the engine-house and electric cables so badly that the Germans could not repair the damage. Simcox and Riddle worked between Dibra and Peshkopeia, with Michael Lis keeping us in touch.

With all these officers dotted about the country we certainly had enough for the winter, and at this stage I would not have welcomed any more British or

Americans, except that we badly needed doctors and surgeons. The Partisan wounded were sorely neglected, and it was grim to think of what would happen to our own. We nursed Sgt. Jenkins, ill with pneumonia, keeping him warm in a leaf hut, and luckily with his robust constitution he pulled through. Our only doctor, Dumoulin, was too far south to help H.Q. when we ran into trouble.

Nicholls caused me some anxiety in these early days, as the rough food and the sharp cold affected his stomach badly. Somewhere he had picked up dysentery, it attacked him off and on and kept him from sleeping properly. He seemed to worry about his health a lot and I began to feel that he might not be robust enough to stand the life, especially if conditions got worse. But he was a good companion for me, and we enjoyed riding across the mountains together to conferences, his long legs nearly scraping the ground beneath the pony's belly.

Our H.Q. was organised by him as an orthodox H.Q., even down to the Italian defence platoon, and we all fitted into a detailed alarm scheme—action on air attack, drill for an air drop, and so on. Michael Lis had a great sense of humour, and was forever incurring Nicholls' wrath with his bedroom French, telling of all the women he had loved. Nicholls used to tear tremendous strips off Trayhorn, our signals officer, a civil engineer from Turkey, and half Turk, who had joined us at the last minute, before leaving Cairo. Excellent operator and engineer, speaking some eight languages, Trayhorn was no soldier in his eyes, and must be taught not to answer back, and not to take it to heart when he was brassed off—in general, to keep well out of Nicholls' way at all times.

Nicholls' French was good, and very useful on all occasions that we dealt with the Albanians, as all educated men spoke French fluently, many of them

having been to France and Belgium. After 1918, when there was a large French Army in the Balkans, it followed that French schools sprang up everywhere, and French became the most used language. The Ball Kombetar Party were better educated than the L.N.C., and, accordingly, spoke more French, so that we could cope with them without using Frederick as an interpreter, which saved any embarrassment, as Frederick had left the Ball Kombetar to join the L.N.C. When required Nicholls interpreted in French at all the main conferences with both parties.

Up to now I had not met the main councils of either party, as they had not arrived in the neighbourhood, but both knew of my arrival and were planning to meet me as soon as possible, keeping the pot boiling by local representatives who visited H.Q. camp, generally at mealtimes, to prepare the way. On two or three occasions they arrived together, and a glowering match would occur, while Nicholls tactfully kept them apart. The L.N.C. adopted the attitude that I had come to support them, and I could not, therefore, deal with any other party. Hence the glowering. I made it quite clear that I had come to back any party that would fight the Germans, and I would deal with any party I wished to approach. In these preliminary skirmishes I did not realise what enmity really existed between the two sides. I thought that they were sparring for our favours, realising that the supplies of the Allies were behind us. I learnt some of their habits, and their extreme greed over food and wine. It was normal for one man to take all the butter on the table, or clear a full dish of jam, or pour all the sugar into his cup. That is, if he came from the L.N.C. The Balli were better mannered. Thereafter, when we saw certain members of the L.N.C. approaching at a mealtime, the rarer foods were taken from the table.

Air supply failed in November, because of the rain, and no replacement came for our rations. We bought locally in El Basan what we could, mainly flour to bake bread, and Italian wine and liqueurs, like Triple Sec. The local brewer was persuaded to part with some bottled beer for us. 'But the Germans will shoot me if I supply you,' he said. 'And the British will shoot you if you don't,' said Tarsi. So we got our beer. A dozen mules would go down to the town with some of the mule leaders to shop and would come back laden three days later. We bought several tents and many sovereigns' worth of fodder for the mules from a German quartermaster.

Our shopping expedition produced a French bulldog for the Mission. Tarsi was sure a bulldog would be welcome for boys of the bulldog breed, and he was duly presented to me, as leader of the Mission, and christened 'Biza.' Where he came from was doubtful—to Albania with an Italian colonel, across to a German Hauptmann after the Italian armistice, from whom he was stolen for the British Mission. I signalled Cairo quickly for a proper collar, engraved suitably. Maggie got busy, and by the next plane arrived a massive studded collar engraved with a Union Jack. Biza wore it with pride. He slept on my bed, went for walks with me, seized Albs by their baggy trousers, and generally grinned and made a thorough nuisance of himself. He was jealous of my Italian charger at first, but after being kicked in the ribs, he learnt a healthy respect for him and kept his distance. Tessio, the Italian vet, operated on him to take out a loose tooth, and succeeded in making the dog more comfortable.

There were Italians everywhere. The Italian armistice in September had driven 45,000 up into the hills; they had not wanted to go to German concentration camps. Their one idea was to get back to Italy. To us, they were a violent headache. Very few of them

wanted to fight. The partisans were only interested in getting their weapons and equipment and their great-coats. What was to happen to them they did not care. Nor could one blame the partisans. The Italians had invaded Albania and ruled the country harshly—during the war they had harassed the partisans and burnt villages, whether the villages were concerned or not. Now that their rule was over they could expect little mercy from the partisans, but, on the whole, they were well treated and were divided up over the country, doing menial tasks—chopping wood, acting as shepherds, tilling the land. In no other way could they have been fed. We absorbed a few at H.Q., a cook, a baker, a barber, two mechanics for the charging engines, our car and motor-bikes, a vet and mule leaders, plus the defence platoon. Under our care they grew strong and well. But they caused a security problem over the country, as German intelligence agents were able to dress as Italians and roam the high ground, marking down our H.Q. and routes.

Kadri Hoja and his lieutenant, Mico, came frequently to meals, always hoping that there had been a stores drop which they could claim. Mico had been in Spain, fighting for the Communists, and had been flung into jail in Tirana by the Italians when they annexed his country. But Mico, with some other stout hearts, had tunnelled under the big prison wall and gone into the mountains to join the partisans. He was very suspicious of us and kept asking why the Allies had sent Royalists to help them instead of Socialists or Communists, the Royalist misunderstanding having arisen because of our regiments—Royal Ulster Rifles, Royal Artillery, Royal Engineers. To try to explain the standing of Household Cavalry, Irish Guards and Coldstream Guards only increased the confusion.

With them to lunch one day came Maleshova, of the

L.N.C. Council, known as the 'Red Poet.' He composed the Partisan songs, political ballads and other choice items such as 'The one man who did not run away,' which caused a lot of hilarity amongst our n.c.o.s, who had been left in some awkward spots to face the Italians while the partisans 'retired to the next ridge to take up a position.' Maleshova had been Professor of Philosophy in Moscow and was well trained to organise the Political Commissars. He came to us to say that the L.N.C. Council had arrived at Labinot and would invite us to a conference shortly. We knew this, and guessed that he had really come along to sum us up. He was a sinister figure and none of us was ever comfortable with him.

On October 30th Hare had prepared an excellent dinner—soup, turkey and a sweet, with Italian champagne and liqueurs, to celebrate my nineteenth wedding anniversary—when the inevitable Kadri and Mico appeared, to say we were invited the next day to a preliminary conference with the Council at Labinot. We were anxious to get rid of them before they spoilt our celebrations, and, after a sticky half-hour, they departed. The evening went well. Too many local marron glacés and liqueurs over a roaring fire nearly defeated everyone.

In the morning the car was loaded up with our valises, and Nicholls, Frederick and I held on to everything while the bare-headed driver swayed round corners of the narrow road, nearly giving us heart failure at seeing the drop of hundreds of feet we had just avoided. At the debussing point we left the car. Our valises were to be collected and brought on to us by mule. We walked smartly over a narrow track for an hour and came to the small house where the conference was being held. Two scruffy sentries presented arms in one sloppy movement. We appeared to have arrived before we were expected, as there was much

running to and fro shouting. At last we were taken into the small conference room and introduced to the assembly. First was Enver Hoja, a big, clean-shaven man of thirty-five, dressed in field boots, breeches and a military jacket, with Sam Browne and a fore-and-aft cap. Enver was educated and polished, as he had travelled and lived in France and Belgium. He had come back to Albania in 1936 to become a professor at Korca University, where he had followed Communism for some years, and eventually became secretary of the Communist Party. He was charming to us, and well-mannered—obviously capable, and one who could drive ruthlessly if he wanted to do so. It is not surprising that he has risen to be head of the State and has held his position.

Next came Maleshova, the poet, whom I have already described. Then Mustafa Ginishi, who had revolted against Zog and co-operated with Abas Kupa against Italy in 1941. He spoke English well, which gave him a good start with us and allayed suspicion. As we got to know him, we all agreed that he was easy to work with, would discuss points sensibly and would argue out difficult matters till he could come to a reasonable conclusion. Added to which he had a delightful sense of humour. Had Mustafa been leading the country instead of Enver it is doubtful if he would have played right into Russia's hands. Enver and Maleshova evidently knew this, as in August 1944 Mustafa was killed in a 'German ambush.' Our opinion is that he was 'knocked off.'

We next met Dali Ndreu, who fought with Tito, was more a soldier than a politician, and rose to command the 1st Partisan Division and later the 1st Corps. There were about six others, who took no part in the discussions, except for Dr. Stylla, who spoke French fluently, after a spell at Toulouse.

After the introductions we sat down to luncheon,

a crude meal of meat and bread and goats' cheese, with rather good raki to drink, tinged rather pinker than usual. We expressed approval of it and were told it was a local brew. Two days later the Council sent two bottles to me at Biza with their compliments.

We got down to business after lunch. Enver Hoja made a speech of welcome to me, and Nicholls replied in perfect French on my behalf. While interpreting slows things up and is apt to irritate one, it does give one time to think, which is helpful when the atmosphere is difficult. Following this Frederick translated a speech for me into Albanian which I had prepared on his advice, setting out the Allies' aims. The Council evidently thought nothing of it and gave the speech rather a cold reception. Enver then asked me if I would give a review of the present world political situation. I said very firmly that I would not, that my mission was solely military. The Council obviously thought I was bluffing, and as good as said so.

Enver said, very pointedly, 'The military situation depends entirely on the political situation, so why will you not first give us your impression of world politics?'

I replied, 'Because I am a soldier and not a politician.'

The atmosphere was already very strained, and I felt that a bad start had been made. The Council accepted my answer very reluctantly. Maleshova seemed particularly disappointed. Politics was his cup of tea, and soldiering clearly was not.

He kept muttering to Enver, who rose again and asked, 'When will the Allies invade the Balkans, and particularly Albania? It is important that we should know, we have many arrangements to make.'

I hesitated before I replied. I knew there was no intention to invade the Balkans, and by this time this should have been clear. Before Sicily was invaded a successful cover plan to draw German divisions into

the Balkans had been put over. All the missions had spread the belief that the Balkans would be invaded, but with the landing in Sicily and Italy surely the gaff was blown.

So I asked, 'Who has said that the Balkans will ever be invaded?'

Enver replied, 'We have been advised, and Major McLean would not deny it.'

I said, 'He was not in a position to confirm or deny it. He did his best to guide you with sound advice. Nor will I deny it. But I will say that you must plan for winter without an invasion, and plan for the spring too, in case no invasion comes then.'

The Council was genuinely taken aback—they evidently thought that the invasion would come to their rescue, and behind it they could reorganise and expand, supplies of arms, clothing and medical stores would be found for them, and in fact, everything in the garden would be lovely. My news came to them as a distinct shock.

We then got down to an agenda I had prepared to establish relations between the Mission and the Council. We first discussed the provision of supplies. I gave them my plans for gun-running by sea. This caused great interest, giving hopes of good tonnage instead of a meagre supply by air, with few aircraft, bad weather and difficulty of Dropping Zones. I told them of the 'Sea View' plans. I asked for a secure bridgehead, inland routes, mule convoys, dumping grounds and a system of distribution. I asked for other reception points on the coast. The Council promised to examine the whole question and organise a system. I told them that their powers to organise would be quickly shown. As the first defended bridgehead did not materialise until May 1944, the organisation evidently proved difficult and the partisans could not cope with it. Also the Balli were on the coast.

My offer of liaison officers to the existing three brigades was refused, the Council preferring attachment for particular operations. They then asked for wireless inter-communication within the country, and I had to explain the technical difficulties in the mountains and also the risk of interception. This was not well received, and they evidently did not believe me.

The problem of dealing with the Italians was thrashed out and a decision taken to distribute them and keep them alive until they could be evacuated—we decided to work on a six months' stretch, which was about as far as we could see at the time; the Albanians' food resources were slender enough as it was, without considering farther ahead than this. I agreed to give the Council a lump sum in gold for buying food stocks to be dumped at convenient points about the country.

Then came a surprise to us. The Ball Kombetar problem was outlined by Enver Hoja. He gave a long historical account of the feud between the two parties. The situation was more serious and dangerous than any of us had known previously. Civil war was about to break out and the Council had issued orders for the Balli to be fought and disarmed wherever met. The Council said they could do this without decreasing their effort against the Germans. This was obvious nonsense.

I spoke very straight to the Council to the effect that this was no time for party quarrels, and their duty was to combine against the common enemy, Germany, and when she was beaten they could settle their quarrels. I threw all my enthusiasm into my pleading and said I would go to the Ball Kombetar Council and say the same thing to them. Would the L.N.C. agree to fight the Germans only, and to co-operate with the Balli to that end?

'Yes,' said Enver, 'we will, but you will see that the Balli will never agree, and that all this trouble is their fault, and there is only one thing to do with them and that is to crush them out of existence.'

At that we left it for the time being, and adjourned to a good dinner and more of the excellent raki.

After dinner, Nicholls and I visited the Italian general, Gen. Azzi, in his tent. He was ill with malaria and a pathetic figure, full of complaints. His staff officer, Col. Barbacinto, was with him, a smart, well-turned-out man. The general's idea was to concentrate 15,000 Italians, supply them by air with guns and ammunition, and turn them into a fighting force again. He had sent out officers to all areas to find out the situation. I could have told him what it was. His proposition was impracticable and quite hopeless; their fighting value had vanished. Their one idea was to get home to Italy. I asked the general to lunch a week later, to tell me what he had learnt from his officers. Nothing, in fact, came of his ideas and he retired to a village to spend the winter out of harm's way.

We slept in our clothes as our valises had not turned up. It had been a tiring day and I had found it a strain to keep my temper and be tactful all the time. We slept soundly. Before we left in the morning I stressed the importance of denying to the Germans unmolested travel on the principal roads. Staff cars and convoys travelled unmolested through the most perfect country for ambushes and sniping. I challenged Enver to a sniping competition on the hillside covering the main Tirana-El Basan road, to see who could knock out the most staff cars and dispatch-riders. This was not 'bull-shoot' on my part, but a genuine attempt to stir them up to attack the roads. Enver accepted, but whenever I tried to stage the match he always had something else to do. He changed his

rifle with telescopic sights, captured from the Germans near Tirana, for a machine pistol, as it was lighter to carry on the march.

The conference broke up rather better than it had started, we had got to know each other a bit, and I had hopes of achieving something. We returned to Biza in the car, rather more safely uphill than coming down. The visit to Labinot had been very interesting. My impressions of Enver Hoja and his Council were rather mixed. They seemed to want to corner us and keep us to themselves, but I was quite determined to meet all parties and decide for myself, by results in action, who was fighting the Germans genuinely and who was not. That should not take long to determine; with officers with both main parties in different parts of the country it should be possible to get enough evidence. I realised that there was a danger of officers being biased in favour of the party they were with, but evidence of fighting or of failure to fight could not be hidden or disputed. The parties were obviously mainly interested in the postwar outlook. If they could impress me enough that they were fighting, and so gain more equipment and supplies, they would stand a better chance when the postwar position had to be worked out. Enver had not wanted me to meet the Balli or the Zogists, but I had brushed that aside and told him his case must be very weak if he was unwilling for me to meet the others. But I thought I could work with him, and encourage him to build up a force which would form a grave embarrassment to the Germans in the spring and summer. I could now meet Abas Kupa and Midhat Frasheri, the leaders of the two other parties, and try hard to get them to work with Enver for the common object. These thoughts occupied my mind for the car journey until we turned into the plain of Biza.

CHAPTER FIVE

WE SPENT the day on a long signal to Cairo, telling our version of the conference. By chance we turned on the wireless for the news and learnt that Albania had been omitted from the conference to decide how best to deal with the Italians in the Balkans. This news came from the Allied Conference at Moscow. As our small country was keeping some 40,000 to 50,000 Italians, some protest should be raised, so off went another hot signal to Cairo. The home propaganda to Albania was always out of step with the facts. Again and again Albanians of all parties complained of our bad propaganda on the B.B.C. and blamed the Mission for misrepresenting the position. This, of course, was not so, but it was difficult to account for it. Probably not enough attention was paid to our news, as we had no Minister representing us in Cairo, but no news at all would have been better than inaccurate news. It was some time before we got this matter right.

The night was very cold, with a heavy frost. Morning was even colder. The kitchen boy brought me a large cup of coffee in bed in my leaf-hut. Biza, the bulldog, grinned and wriggled. I got up and went for a walk in my flying suit and short white duffle coat. Everything was smothered in hoar frost, the powder falling off the bushes as we walked through them. No one was about. We followed the stream, swollen by the rains. This was the time for a German patrol to catch me, as the partisans had caught two German *Feldwebels* two days ago, near Tirana. They were new to the country, and had gone for a long walk outside

the town, when they were captured and brought into the mountains for interrogation by the Council. They had been flown in from Russia with other technical troops for a rest. Knowing the way the Germans treated captured guerrillas, I thought it likely this would be their last rest. Both *Feldwebels* were fine men. I asked one several questions, but his replies were guarded. He appealed to me to take the two of them over, as they were not being properly treated, but I explained that this was impossible.

Details of their documents were sent to Cairo. Nothing more was heard of them.

I doubt whether any prisoners survived on either side. Hard knocks were given and taken. We ourselves had been warned what to expect if we were captured. Hitler had issued a strict order that all parachutists caught behind their lines were to be liquidated, and we knew that many had been. It was one of the risks, known and accepted.

After breakfast a message arrived from Shengerj village that Abas Kupa awaited me. We saddled up our ponies and had a new baggage mule loaded with our valises. The frost and German fodder were too much for the mule—he went quite haywire, scattering our kit all round the country, making our start later than we meant it to be. It was a lovely ride down and we arrived just on dark. The sunset had been superb, and the light on the mountains perfect.

Abas Kupa gave a long address on the division that had occurred between the L.N.C. and the Balli. As he had been on the L.N.C. Council for some time he should know. He described his position now as being 'Not of the Balli, but rather a branch of it. I am a Zogist, of the Legality Party,' a phrase used in 1924 when Zog had seized power and 'upheld Legality.' He told us he had been a follower of Zog and maintained order in his own country, becoming well known when

he resisted the Italian invasion in 1939 at Durazzo, as one of the few leaders who did resist. He then fled to Belgrade. Returning to continue work against the Italians, he joined the L.N.C., but gradually drew apart from them and began to side with Ball Kombetar, who, incidentally, did not favour Zog. Hence his position of not being of the Balli but rather a branch of them.

He struck me as 'foxy' and not very well educated. He claimed to have a big following—he promised to fight the Germans but he must have arms. If I could not supply them owing to the weather he knew where he could get some, given the money. I was not very impressed, but I felt I must give him a chance to prove himself. I agreed to get him three aircraft drops of clothing and arms, especially 3-inch mortars, which he particularly wanted.

We then went to bed, in brass bedsteads, and were eaten alive by bugs. At 2.15 a.m. we were wakened by distant sounds of a heavy bombardment, which seemed to be naval guns; target Durazzo. In the morning we were given breakfast—hot milk and boiled eggs and bread. Abas Kupa must have known English habits.

Before I left I asked him to attack the roads with snipers and ambushes, but he seemed to favour the great battle, with corps concerned and himself as the great general. A better country for guerrilla attacks could not be imagined, and, as the Albanian is a natural long-range shot, the roads should have been unsafe for the Germans everywhere.

We rode back in glorious sunshine—the beech woods at Biza were at their best in their autumn colours. The trees grow very big and in large forests all over the country. Nicholls and I had a race across the plain, with a neck-and-neck finish. The camp was full of work, but everyone was happy. Our double



17. FREDERICK NOSI, THE BRIGADIER AND BABA FAJA AT H.Q.



18. 'SKED TO CAIRO'



19. ENVER HOJA



20. DIBRA

pneumonia case continued to make progress and would be up soon. Chesshire was pushing on with his building programme, with Italian labour, building extra accommodation for Wheeler and the officers who would be arriving in the November moon period. All the others were out in various directions, Hare having gone down to Dibra with Kemp, as we had news of trouble down there. Michael Lis arrived in without warning, having ridden up fast from Dibra and missed meeting Hare. There had been fighting between L.N.C. and Xhem Gostivari. Riddle had managed to keep the Peshkopie nationalist forces from joining in, but the situation was sticky.

A sound and encouraging statement was made in the House of Commons by Mr. Churchill about Albania, and broadcast by the B.B.C., so I asked for copies of the daily papers reporting it to be dropped in. *The Times* had a beautifully printed small airmail edition at this time, which was most useful for propaganda in reporting happenings, and speeches by the great.

At lunchtime four of the L.N.C. Council, headed by Enver and Mustafa, appeared to pay their respects, bringing some maps and bottles of raki. Guri produced a good lunch and the visit was friendly and cheerful and enjoyed by all.

In the afternoon heavy rain set in and made us less optimistic about our air sorties. It rained in torrents all night and all the next day. With the rain came messages of heavy fighting between the L.N.C. and the Balli in several directions, but no fighting against the Germans. Hare and Kemp arrived back, soaked through, to say that Dibra had quietened down, but the sooner I could confer with the Balli main council the better.

Abas Kupa asked to be released, as he could wait no longer. We replied that he must wait, whatever happened.

Then Col. Rossetti, of Gen. Azzi's staff, arrived to ask if we would testify by wireless to the General Staff in Italy that Gen. Azzi's troops were taking part in the fighting against the Germans. Everyone seemed very keen to say they were fighting the Boche, without actually fighting him. I felt that we could bring the country to a standstill with two brigades of British troops acting as guerrillas, or with half a dozen Commandos. Perhaps the rain was making us a bit irritable, so it was a good thing it was easing off, giving some chance of a sortie.

A small boy came from the Balli Council to say they were waiting at Shengerj. This was something of an anti-climax, as Abas Kupi had insisted that an escort of fifty Balli would be sent to do me honour. I had protested that I did not want an escort, and along came the small boy, sweating from his exertion up the mountain path to reach Biza quickly; overcome by shyness he would accept neither food nor drink.

Once again Nicholls and I set forth for Shengerj, taking with us this time Sgt. Chisholm, with his typewriter. It was to be a grave meeting and there might be an agreement to record. On the way down we ran into a storm of rain and hail which even the horses and mules would not face; they halted, with their quarters towards it, stood shivering in a stream on the path. Coming with the force of the storm a strange group passed us. A Turk, wearing a red fez, walking, a rich-looking gentleman, with three women in yashmaks, riding. It was unusual to see the man walking and the women riding. I wondered if they could be Boche in disguise; it was the sort of obvious thing they would do. But the track we were on came straight through Shengerj village, so they must be genuine. Anyway, with the hail and wind and lightning, it was too rough to bother about them; we were soaked through, and so was the kit on the baggage mule.

The storm passed and we slithered down the hill into the village, where we were met by Midhat Frasheri, Vasil Andoni, Halil Maci, Abas Kupa and Osman Mema, with a crowd in attendance. We were so wet we were hustled into the house to change and dry before a huge wood fire. This was a better-mannered Council than Enver had around him, though it was doubtful if they would be as effective—they had the polish but not the drive. They had not lived rough in the mountains with their forces like the partisans. They would be more pleasant to deal with. All spoke good French or English. Once again Nicholls interpreted—Sgt. Chisholm took notes at a table in the corner.

Midhat Frasheri gave an opening address, on the history of Ball Kombetar, of which he was president. Osman Mema lay in the corner near me, chattering with fever. I dosed him with aspirin. Midhat went on and on—we thought he would never stop. He was reputed to be seventy and he talked like an old man. At last he finished. His last sentence was a plea to me to have nothing to do with politics—they ruined a man's life: neither must I let my sons and daughters play at politics. I asked him how, in the Balkans, it was possible to avoid them. Already we were having to consider them more than soldiering. I asked him who started the fighting between L.N.C. and Balli, and received the expected answer. We then told them of the meeting with the L.N.C. Council, and Enver Hoja's promise to stop civil war if the Balli would sign an agreement to fight the Germans wholeheartedly.

This caused an uproar and a very hostile atmosphere. Everyone talked at once. Osman Mema forgot his fever and sat up to join in. Abas Kupa's eyes flashed and he became most warlike. The talk went round and round until eight o'clock. Sgt. Chisholm was having his first experience of Albanian negotiations

and was bewildered. We had come to a complete deadlock. Nothing would induce Midhat to agree to work with the L.N.C. I gave it up. I had tried every persuasion I knew. Impossible. Enver Hoja had been right. The Ball Kombetar had refused to sign an undertaking to fight the Germans.

At dinner the atmosphere was happy and friendly; the conversation very interesting. They were too well mannered to bring the strain of the conference room to the dinner table. I was horrified, as the senior guest, to be presented with a sheep's head whole, eyes glaring at me and lumps of gristle adhering to the skull. It was too much for me. I asked if the skull could be split in the kitchen and the brain brought to me. This was done, and I was let off swallowing two sheep's eyes.

Bed was welcome, with valises made up on top of the mattresses to keep out the bugs. It rained hard in the night, and then snowed, the first fall of winter. At 8 a.m. Vasil Andoni and Halil Maci came into our room to say they had talked far into the night and had at last decided to give me the signed written declaration that they would fight the Germans wholeheartedly; they would also promise to stop fighting the L.N.C. Would we lend them our typewriter to make out the statement? It was made out in Albanian and in French. Arthur and I were simply delighted. Now all should be plain sailing. We would co-ordinate the joint effort, the Germans would be kept busy and would have to be reinforced, and we would have succeeded in our mission.

The ride uphill, in pouring rain, was cheerfully undertaken, and we sent off signals on our return to inform Cairo of the good news. A message was sent down the hill to Labinot to tell Enver that we were back, and could he come to Biza tomorrow or should we go down to him?

There was more snow in the night. Chesshire was going ahead with his construction programme, which included building stables for the mules and horses—already they were feeling the cold. Tessio, the vet, was worried. We would lose many of them if they were not under cover soon. Wooden huts were to be built of beech planks, with trees felled and split on the spot by Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs, a group of stunted, wizened, forest woodcutters, well worthy of Walt Disney's patronage.

The night after our return Nicholls and I shared duty as reception committee on the Dropping Zone, a plane having been signalled. We lit a fire to keep warm at half-past six and waited hopefully, while the fire parties, the working parties, the covering parties, the mules and their leaders stood by in the edge of the wood. An aircraft was heard in the distance, but it did not come near us. We walked up and down, we chattered, we listened. We took turns to lie down by the fire and snooze. This might go on till three or four in the morning. The mules were restive. We wondered if that plane had been for us and was off course. It started to cloud over slowly. There was plenty of cloud ceiling for a drop. We needed food badly, more explosives, winter clothes, arms and ammunition for distribution, boots and battledress by the thousand. And most of all we wanted our mail, letters from home, newspapers, books to read. They would be in No. 1 container, which would be searched for and found, dragged to a mule to be loaded and taken straight up to the mess hut before it was mislaid or stolen—the most precious of all containers. Someone at the mess would start hacking at it with a chisel and hammer, because the catches and the hinges would be bound to be damaged during the drop, through banging against another container, or hitting a rock as it landed. The 'chute might be torn, or

might not open, and then it would fall, making a whistling noise. Everyone on the Dropping Zone would freeze, expecting it to fall on him.

The cloud was building up now, thicker and thicker, and then the first flake fell, and then others, until it was snowing heavily. We said it was only a shower and it would clear soon, the moon was still well up. Nicholls was lying down asleep. The snow was melting near the flames, so I woke him. I can still picture the fire, snowflakes, Christmas trees in the wood, my balaclava helmet over my ears, Nicholls sitting on the wet ground, half asleep. Time to pack up; no good going on being optimistic—no plane tonight, no letters from home. We staggered up the hill and left our fire to be smothered. It was midnight. We brewed some cocoa and dosed it with rum. Biza, the bulldog, was cross when I lifted him off my bed.

It snowed all night and was lying a foot deep in the morning. Snow White and the Dwarfs said work was impossible and departed. The horses and mules did not like the snow. The vet was nearly distracted. Chesshire departed for Orenje with Kadri Hoja to examine houses for our winter quarters. We told him he had better not come back until he had it fixed. Enver and Co. arrived for lunch.

Afterwards I told them, with pride, of my success with the Balli. I produced the written declaration to fight the Boche, which Enver had said at Labinot was what he wanted. I said I would pin the Balli to it by having an announcement made on the B.B.C. There was dead silence. Enver was completely taken by surprise. He had evidently not expected the Balli to give the undertaking, whether they meant it or not. He rose to his feet in a fury, he blamed me for interfering, he said what he thought of the B.B.C. and of the Balli. He would not be deterred from his

purpose to fight the Germans but he would destroy the Balli at the same time.

Civil war was on. I was quite certain that he could not compete with Germans and Balli at the same time. The only result would be that he would attack the Balli as soon as he felt strong enough, and go on attacking them until they were finished. There would be little fighting against the Germans. Could the Balli hold their own? Or even defeat Enver? They certainly would not do that without fighting hard, and so far they had given little evidence in actual battle of doing that.

It was very disappointing after our high hopes of a combined effort against the Germans by all parties. The fact was that the L.N.C. realised that the most powerful party after the war would seize power. The Balli were sitting on the fence, hoping to be safe whether the Axis or the Allies came through safely. The L.N.C. Partisans were sure of themselves and relied on the Allies winning the war. They were determined to weaken and destroy the Balli before hostilities ceased. The problems confronting me were many and varied. I could not support civil war—my task was to promote fighting against the Germans. Winter was on us, when not much could be done except plan for an all-out effort in the spring. The position must be referred to Cairo.

The conference finished badly. The whole affair had been bungled by Enver; he had not come out of it very well; had broken a promise, had been outwitted by the Balli, and he was in a thorough temper. I spoke quite plainly: if he did enter civil war I would cut off all supplies from the L.N.C. Mission. I was only empowered to back him if he fought the Boche, and, in my opinion, he could not do both. The threat of loss of supplies and the Mission, while it did not mean much at present, would mean a lot in the spring. It

would mean more if the Mission were transferred to the Balli. I would report his attitude to Cairo at once for the information of the Foreign Office. He said he did not care a damn for the Foreign Office and departed down the mountain, talking volubly.

G.H.Q. replied to my signal, confirming that I was not to support civil war, and saying that I was to continue to do my best to support effort from either side against the Germans.

Of most importance to us at the moment was the establishing of winter quarters in a village below the heavy snow line, with an alternative village to occupy in case of trouble. Shengerj had been considered too difficult for wireless reception and a death-trap should the enemy attack us. Biza was already too wet, cold and inaccessible in heavy snow. The choice, therefore, of Orenje was made, a village below Biza and farther to the south. It would be warmer there, with good defences in case of attack, and a centre of tracks leading in every direction. The alternative chosen was Martanesh, on the north side of the mountains, with the same advantages as Orenje. With good information, it was impossible for the Boche to surprise us, and, with the woods covering the mountains, we could keep moving from one area to another to avoid all contact.

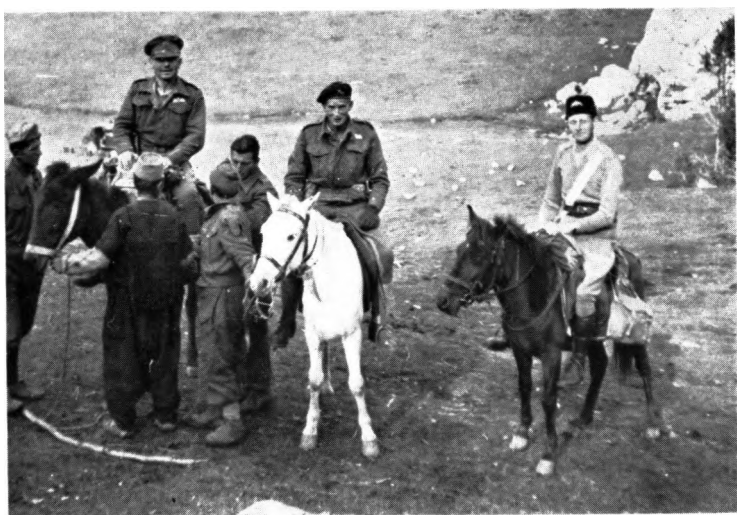
Nicholls and Chesshire had already gone to Orenje, with Kadri Hoja, to negotiate for houses and stabling. Kadri, on this occasion, proved most helpful. He was known and greeted everywhere. When it came to protracted negotiations for the house he was splendid in dealing with the families who occupied it. He found alternative accommodation for them, he kept their demands for rent to a reasonable figure, and everyone was satisfied and cheerful. What was more, he evacuated all three families from the house in double-quick time to let Chesshire and his workmen in to



21. (*above*) LABINOT
TRACK TO SKUMBINI
CROSSING



22. TYPICAL COUNTRY
FOR OPERATIONS



23. TRAYHORN, JIM CHESHIRE AND PETER KEMP



24. MYSLIM PESA

clean the place and do urgent repairs. A Dropping Zone was found not far away—excellent for stores, but too rough for bodies. The fires would be hidden from view from the surrounding countryside by low foothills. All very satisfactory.

At Biza, Kemp was just leaving for Peshkopeia and Kossova, when Bulman and Corsair arrived from Pesa, having lost everything they possessed in the fighting; their kit, their gold, and wireless sets. Seymour, Sgt. Smith and Tpr. Roberts were still in the battle down there, with Myslim Pesa, one of the best guerrilla leaders on the Partisan side. His country lay south of Tirana, on the foothills, and he knew it backwards. The Germans had produced their first set-piece attack against him. They had surrounded a big area, with armoured cars and tanks forming a mobile cordon on the roads, and were driving the area from different directions with cavalry and infantry, covered by a cab-rank patrol of Messerschmidt fighters in the air ready to attack the ground, with Fiesler Storch observation planes spotting. The purpose of the drive was to destroy all opposition in the area.

Myslim Pesa aimed to hit back hard by day without becoming too involved, to break up his forces into small groups and to escape from the area by night. He would remain outside the cordon until the Germans called off the drive, when his forces would return to the Pesa area. It was not as easy as it sounds, the partisans often having to fight hard to stave off destruction by day, until they were able to slip away by night on well-known routes. In the process they lost a lot of men.

Seymour, of the Scots Fusiliers, had been with Myslim for some time, with Sgt. Smith of the R.A.F., Bdr. Hill of the Royal Artillery and Tpr. Roberts, Royal Corps of Signals. Sgt. Smith plays a further

part in this story, but I will introduce him now. A Yorkshireman from Leeds, thick-set, blunt, humorous, with not a scrap of fear in his body or mind. Flying over the desert when the appeal came for officers and n.c.o.s for Special Operations Executive, Smith felt that rear-gunner in a Wellington was boring, so he volunteered to parachute into Albania. Now that I know him well I know how restless he can be, and only an active, exciting life will contain him. He first distinguished himself during this Pesa fighting, when the small British group was crossing a sandy river bed under heavy machine-gun fire. Hill was hit half-way across and fell. Smith went out at once for him and brought him to cover. But Hill was dead and his body had to be left, the Germans subsequently burying him at Petrela.

The same night Roberts was captured by the Germans and disarmed. Roberts, however, had a second small pistol hidden in his stocking, and with this he shot one of his guards, pushed a second over a cliff and escaped, but, having nothing to eat for several days except berries, he became ill from exposure and died.

Seymour and Sgt. Smith, after being chased around the Pesa country for some days, broke through the cordon and made their way up to us at Biza, Seymour suffering from malaria. They were both very tired and needed rest and quiet to recuperate. Luckily, we had enough clothes to outfit all four arrivals from the Pesa battle, and stock them up again with gold.

Corsair and Bulman were sent down to Xibra to join Smyth, who was covering the Dropping Zone in the Abas Kupa country. We did not like keeping too many people at H.Q.—the fewer we had to move about in case of trouble the better. I was already planning to send Seymour and Sgt. Jenkins, still recovering from pneumonia and desperately weak,

down to 'Sea View' by easy stages, as from there they could be evacuated by sea to Italy. Seymour now had a bad cough and was not fit for active work at that height. He had done excellently and deserved a rest out of the country. Smith could stay with me as bodyguard. He was to get all the excitement he craved for.

The enemy were already taking an unhealthy interest in us, with an aircraft circling our wood at 7.30 a.m. and again at 2.30 p.m., each time coinciding with a wireless transmission to Cairo. Day working was cut to a minimum and night working substituted, as we were evidently being located by direction-finding apparatus. Korca, our shopping steward in El Basan, came back with news that the Boche had raided the town, made many arrests and searches, and confiscated all his purchases.

At 8 p.m. a letter came from the L.N.C. Council saying that they had received information that the Germans were about to make a three-pronged drive up into the mountains in Chermenika where we were living. One column would come from Librash, south-east of us, one from Labinot, due south, and one from Priske, south-west. Coming after Korca's news of El Basan, and the plane trying to find our position by cross-checking the direction of our wireless beam, this news might well be true. The question was when to expect the drive to begin. We had not yet learnt from bitter experience how inaccurate these wild rumours were. At this time I took no risks, ordering a night watch and dawn stand-to, and redundant papers were burnt, all signals destroyed, rucksacks were packed ready for a quick move. Sgt. Jenkins worried us, he had developed tonsillitis now, after his long, severe illness. To move him in this weather might kill him.

The night passed quietly. Korca went off to try to buy flour and any other food he could. The non-

arrival of aircraft had left us very short, and now that the Germans had raided El Basan our local contacts were terrified to sell to us. Chesshire and Frederick Nosi went to Martanesh to ask Baba Faja, the Bek-tashi priest, to arrange a house for us as an alternative H.Q. to which we could move Sgt. Jenkins and Seymour. For the fourth time recently we made ready to receive a drop, although the sky was cloudy and the wind strong. In case of accidents we took splints to the Dropping Zone. Heavy rain set in but Hare held on until a signal came saying no aircraft were coming. Once again a protest went to Cairo. There was always much ill-feeling in the field when sorties signalled to be coming failed to materialise. Had an explanation followed we would have understood, but space on the air was considered too precious for explanations. We always felt that it was not appreciated at our base how much work and preparation went into a reception and how much disappointment was felt when no plane arrived. At base they felt that we did not appreciate engine failures, bad weather, and changes in policy of allotting aircraft.

But, in fact, everyone did his best to support us—it was just bad luck when things went wrong, only it was vital to us that they should not go wrong. We were highly strung and not in the mood to make allowances. It is always natural to blame one's Headquarters. We never doubted that the R.A.F. would find us if they could.

All night there was a strong gale and torrential rain. Everything in our huts was soaking. In the morning a battle seemed to be brewing, mortar fire and artillery fire sounding down on the El Basan-Struga road. Then three figures were seen taking stock of our base. Hare and Chesshire went out to intercept them, but could find no one. In case of a raid we were packed ready to move, but nothing more happened.

Reception for aircraft was again arranged, though there could be no chance of a drop in this weather. Suddenly the noise, first of one plane and then of another, above us and circling. We lit the fires, in case they should find us, but they remained above the cloud layer until they departed. It was Wheeler and the rest of our staff again trying to drop. In the light of what happened eventually it was just as well that the cloud stopped them. They had made four attempts to reach us and were baulked each night by bad weather. Flying time for the round trip from Tocr was eleven hours, three of which were spent searching the mountain tops for the Dropping Zone at Biza in cloud and bad visibility at night. The monotony, discomfort and disappointment of those false attempts to parachute can be imagined, with the morning return to North Africa to jettison the stores on to the airfield before making a landing.

On the fifth occasion they decided to drop farther south and arrived over Krushove at 500 feet in glorious moonshine to smell the smoke of the pinewood fires guiding them in. Wheeler came down in a pine tree, from which he was extricated by Palmer and Smith, now with the Partisan 4th Brigade.

The arrival coincided with a period of German drives in the neighbourhood, so that they were forced into marching from place to place to avoid being captured, until Staravecke was reached, beside an ideal dropping ground. Here two tragedies quickly occurred. First, a farmhouse they had occupied caught fire. There was a rapid exodus and, in the rush, Layzell, who had come from Hawick at my request, was dangerously wounded in the head by a bullet from his machine pistol, which had been accidentally fired by a blow from his heavy haversack as he slung it over his shoulder. The doctor was present but could not save Layzell, who died that night.

At the same time as this accident occurred, an aircraft arrived and started to drop stores. As it circled for the second run in, an engine failed, forcing the plane to crash into a mountainside two miles from the farm, where it burst into flames and was burnt out. There was only one survivor, the occupant of the rear turret, which had been broken off by the crash and flung many yards away. The gunner, dazed but conscious, was still inside the wreckage, unhurt apart from a minor wound in his foot. In the early morning Layzell was buried on a hilltop near the farm, and the aircrew beside their Halifax.

The Mission suffered a third blow shortly afterwards when Major Leake, the head of our office branch, jumped into Albania to see for himself how things were going in the field. On one of the rare occasions that the *Luftwaffe* attacked the Mission H.Q. camp, Leake was hit in the head by a bomb splinter and killed, near Shepr.

CHAPTER SIX

WE WENT to bed.

I was just asleep when someone splashed into my hut, calling, 'General, General!' It was an Albanian runner from the Partisan base, with a message written in French, saying that a column of 200 Germans had been seen advancing from the Lunik area, which would bring them in from the north. Coming on top of the reports of the last two days, this news seemed to show that the Germans were starting their drive into Chermenika. Nicholls was in bed as I went into his hut, but not asleep—dysentery was upsetting him and he was not at all well.

With protractors and map we reckoned that the enemy column could not reach us before 4 a.m. I gave the order to move to Martanesh, leaving Hare and Chesshire with a small rearguard to watch the Germans and keep me informed. If the Germans did not come they were to protect the camp from looting until we had time to move the stores.

It was lucky that we had rehearsed a withdrawal and had foreseen what might happen. Nicholls set about organising the move, with Hare and Chesshire helping him. The wireless station was packed up by Trayhorn and Sgt. Melrose and loaded on to mules. The worrying question was how Sgt. Jenkins would stand the move—five hours' ride across the mountain top in pelting rain at night, at the end of a bout of pneumonia. Seymour was not in too good shape either, with bronchitis and malaria. We wrapped them both in masses of clothes and duffle coats and mounted

them on ponies, each of them carrying an umbrella as some small protection.

We moved off in a deluge of rain, with a column of animals some sixty strong. The track led through the forest, which was pitch dark. The march was a nightmare—animals and loads slipping, men shouting. Trees were down, the path was bogged, and in places small landslides had carried it away. The mules were magnificent. They plodded through mud, bog and streams, seldom falling or faltering. A horse without a rider or load caused trouble, upsetting the whole column as it dashed about, kicking men and animals impartially, whimpering and neighing in its fright. It nearly upset Sgt. Jenkins, and then lashed out at my horse, landing with both hind feet on the shoulder, touching my knee as I reined back.

Half-way, we came to a torrent, with a log bridge over it, so slippery that the horses and mules could not cross it. A way through the boulders was found, Italian and Albanian muleteers plunged in, dragging and whacking the mules, which slipped and fell but somehow got through.

Seymour was coughing badly. Sgt. Jenkins was silent, but they were both sticking it well and said they were neither wet nor cold.

At 7 a.m. we halted in a fir wood, a mile and a half from Martanesh. The column was dispersed in sections, guards were posted and breakfast made. I went forward with the sick to try to get them under cover in Martanesh. We found Baba Faja and the local Partisan defence platoon. We set them about finding a house for us, and while they were doing it we sat in front of a fire eating American K rations.

By 10 a.m. they came back to say we could have a farmhouse on the high ground overlooking the village. The occupants were moving out. A partisan was sent to bring the column into the village. By one o'clock

everyone was in, stores off-loaded, and the signal pedal-charger in the stable beneath the house whining away as it topped up the wireless batteries. Guri, the cook, produced some food for lunch, and everyone lay down on the floor to sleep, overcome with exhaustion.

Nicholls and I had been talking over various problems when there was a sudden roar of aircraft, low down. Two German ME 109s, flying in tight formation, skimmed our roof and flew very low over the village, disappearing towards Dibra. We went out and asked the villagers if the fighters had been over before, but this was the first time they had been seen. We soon knew them as 'Gert and Daisy.' They chased contours all over our mountains, and appeared out of valleys and from behind woods with no warning. We wondered if they were covering the German column which had caused us to evacuate Biza—or were they looking for us?

We had a sleep and went down to the village to visit Baba Faja. His monastery was not far from the village, or rather the remains of it, as the Italians had sent a column some time ago to burn it. Baba Faja reassured us. It would take a German column a long time to reach us, they would have to pass through some unfriendly country, the partisans here were stout-hearted and would give a good account of themselves. We would get ample warning. He told us that Dibra had been attacked by the Germans, with infantry supported by armoured cars and artillery.

As usual, Baba Faja sang some songs to us in a deep baritone, his beard quivering, his hands crossed on his paunch. In the candlelight he looked like a character from Chu Chin Chow or Hassan. His girl brought raki and goats' cheese before we left to stumble up the path in the dark.

While we lay in bed, we appreciated the intentions of the German commander. He was trying to break

up the Partisan forces in winter by opening up the roads everywhere. He had not enough divisions to do more than attack one area at a time, and then in the easiest and most accessible country. First Pesa had been cleaned up, to the south of us, now the plain round Dibra, to the north, was the target. Next the three-pronged drive from El Basan would strike up into Chermenika. Before it began we would do best to break out of the area and go right down south, where we could see the winter out, reorganise, re-equip and train for the spring. The Partisan forces there were much stronger, and in that difficult country the Boche could not take us on with any success. I would advise Enver Hoja to do this as soon as possible. He would not like it. He had struggled to spread north into the Tirana area and it would be a loss of prestige, but better to remain intact than be broken up, as we undoubtedly would be if we remained in Chermenika. Enver already had stirred up both Boche and Balli, and he was none too strong himself. We would be driven below the snow line by the weather and our whereabouts known to everyone. We would be achieving nothing.

The following day I decided to set off myself to find the L.N.C. Council to put my plan to them. The German column had not reached Biza, so Hare and Chesshire had joined us at Martanesh, arranging a ferry system with mules to lift the balance of the stores. As soon as their backs were turned the Italians raided our kit and stores, but were caught by the Partisan, Russi, and sent under escort to the Partisan camp to be executed. After the kind way we had treated them it was a sad return. Hare said the camp looked as if it had been blitzed.

I left after breakfast. The country was soaked from a tremendous thunderstorm the previous evening, flashes of lightning, crashes of thunder being right on

top of us, and hailstones piling up against the house and sheds. Frederick came with me to interpret, and Sgt. Melrose with a wireless set in case Nicholls wanted to get at me through Cairo. He was very against my going unprotected, with the disturbed state of the neighbourhood, but I had to see Enver soon, and I could get about quicker without an escort and be less conspicuous.

We took the same track as we had used on that dreadful night march. It was easier by day, and the horses walked the bridge, so we did not have to get wet in the torrent. We took care approaching the plain at Biza. All three of us dismounted. Sgt. Melrose acted as horse-holder. I crawled up into a bush with my field glasses and examined our old camp, the woods and the path. On a track through the trees about a mile away there was a column marching with mules, loaded with mountain guns. They were in grey-green uniform, which looked like Boche uniform. I beckoned to Frederick, gave him my glasses and showed him the column. He examined them, and I heard a peculiar noise, like castanets. I looked at Frederick—his teeth were chattering loudly, whether from excitement or fear I did not know. I moved to another viewpoint and waited for the column to come into the open. I thought they were Italians. I told Frederick to stay where he was with Sgt. Melrose, and I would canter over to them. They were Italians sure enough, and were going to the Partisan base—they had come from the high ground above Shengerj where the L.N.C. Council were resting protected by the Partisan Brigade. Were they sure about the Council? Yes, quite sure, Enver Hoja was there, and the political commissar, Maleshova. Four Italian mountain guns were covering Shengerj in case the Boche came up from Priske.

I cantered back to Frederick and Sgt. Melrose. As

we crossed the plain we were astonished to see the Mission car being driven by the old Albanian driver, who did not realise we had left Biza. He had been down to El Basan for repairs. Frederick pumped him for news of the Boche, but he had seen nothing extraordinary.

'But what of the minefield we laid to give us warning of Boche approach?'

'Oh, that was lifted by the Partisan Brigade so that they could get their truck up and down for food.'

'But they had promised to protect the minefield.'

'Ah, yes, but you see, they must have food.'

We had been wide open for days and not known it. Luckily the Germans had not known how easily they could have waded into us.

We left our horses with a shepherd at his sheepfold and went by car by the upper road to see the Council. This saved us a lot of time. It was a clear morning and from the car we could see right down to the plain to the north of Tirana.

Shengerj looked peaceful, spread up the hillside, with flocks of goats on the rocks above it, but the villagers could not have felt easy with the Partisan Brigade sitting above them. If the Germans came up the road from Priske they would come through the village and be attacked by the Italian artillery. Shengerj was bound to suffer—it was mostly a Balli village and Enver would not spare it.

The brigade were occupying huts which had housed the engineer guards when the mountain road had been built by the Italians. The partisans were on parade, being harangued by Maleshova, probably on some political aspect of operations. The men were badly dressed in civilian clothes, few had uniform or boots, but all had modern weapons of some kind and bandoliers of ammunition, and every man had several Mills grenades hanging at his belt, mostly precariously by

their pins. The standard of maintenance of arms was excellent, all weapons were clean, bright and well oiled. The tradition of long-range shooting had been passed down, but many of the partisans were townees and it was doubtful whether they knew how to shoot. Quite a number of girls were with the platoons, most of them in uniform, and all armed. They fought side by side with the men in battle, and seemed to stand the hardships remarkably well. The Balli and the Germans giped at them and made the worst sort of propaganda about camp followers and brothels, but the partisans were very strict in their conduct, the girls were housed together and were treated with respect. I do not think there was any misbehaviour, and any man who made a pass at them was risking his life and would have been shot out of hand.

Enver came over to greet me. He immediately drew my attention to the lack of boots and uniforms, greatcoats for winter, and medical stores. I agreed they were badly wanted, but I reminded him that, when we had first met at Labinot, I had explained all the difficulties of air supply and had said I was organising a sea supply, but that he must exploit the distribution inland to his troops. What had happened? Enver shrugged his shoulders and said it was being organised, but the Balli country covered the reception point. I said that ample stores for both Balli and L.N.C. could be landed there, if they would only work together instead of fighting each other, the only one to benefit from the quarrel was the German, who exploited the difference. We left it at that.

I inspected the brigade. They were not impressive. But McLean had told me how well they could fight if they wanted. He had seen them rout a German brigade from Tirana, which had tanks and artillery in support, in the Pesa country. They had collected the arms and clothing from the dead after the

Germans had pulled back into Tirana. The Italian detachment of mountain guns was the only Italian formation being used by the partisans. It had two excellent officers in charge, who said the detachment intended to give a good account of itself. The gunners were not looking their best in dirty uniforms; they were half-starved and racked with malaria.

The brigade then sang the usual melancholy Slav songs before the midday meal. Food was on a subsistence level, judging by the meagre lunch we had. At the conference held afterwards, I gave my advice on the move down south and the possibility of sea supply. I promised to leave Hare with Kadri Hoja in the Chermenika area, so that we could keep contact with Baba Faja; could keep the air supply going and continue to recruit, equip and train. Active operations would have to die down until the spring. But the main object was to move quickly, before we were trapped and unable to get out. Dead silence followed. Enver then said they would consider the move—much was involved—and they would let me know when they had decided. They were evidently very worried at the way the situation was developing.

We boarded the car and rattled back to Biza, saddled up and hacked fast through the woods to avoid being caught in the dark. Nicholls was pleased to see us back safely so soon, as he had made up his mind we would be scuppered.

Next day he went to recce the track to Vale village, which had been suggested to me as a good hide-out if Martanesh was threatened. The road to it went straight up the mountainside in continuous Z turns, the village stretching for four miles, with only isolated houses. He arrived back three hours after dark, soaked to the skin, having had to scale a cliff on the way. The road was only practicable by day, and then only by a man unladen.

The weather was shocking, heavy rain and thunderstorms making wireless contact with Cairo impossible. We were trying from Biza, where Hare was evacuating stores with Sgt. Melrose, as well as from Martanesh, where Trayhorn was living isolated in a cottage up the mountain so as not to be screened. Three days had passed with no contact. Conditions in the farm were not comfortable. We were out of petrol for the lamps, out of firewood for the fires, were short of food and candles. The farmhouse only had two rooms, one for the officers and one for the n.c.o.s, but Seymour coughed so much he was banished into the n.c.o.s' room, as they were all coughing too.

Michael Lis now joined us from Dibra, having lost everything in the battle there when the Germans captured the town. Farther north at Peshkopeia the village had been outflanked without a fight and also occupied by the Germans. What had happened to Kemp and Sgt. Gregson Alcott at Dibra we did not know. Riddle and Simcox at Peshkopeia had taken to the hills.

This made the situation very open for us. Dibra was only four hours away, and we could expect little warning. It was now no use sending Michael back to get news. The *chetas* (Albanian bands) would look after Riddle and Simcox, and Kemp would probably join them.

Despite the weather, Trayhorn got through to Cairo on his set and heard that McLean and Smiley had crossed to Italy from 'Sea View' and an R.N. officer had come in. Three Americans had also landed. Being Intelligence they were working on their own and did not come under my command, but were on their way up to see me, if they could get through.

The weather conditions were so bad I decided to send Seymour and Jenkins out of Albania as soon as possible, now that 'Sea View' was working. They could

pick up Roberts on the way, now safe with the partisans. We were not to know at the time that Roberts had died of exhaustion. Seymour and Jenkins left next day. They were both far from well and had a rough journey in front of them before they reached the boat. Jenkins had been a model patient and had never groused all through the pneumonia or tonsillitis.

Again a German aircraft circled over us twice between 7 and 8 a.m., and he was back once more just after 10 a.m., before the rain drove him off and it poured for the rest of the day. We had little to do except roast chestnuts which Hare had sent over from our old camp. We went for a walk after tea and were startled by volleys of rifle fire from the valley leading to Dibra. Nothing happened after it so we returned to the farm to await news.

In the morning, at 7 a.m., more firing broke out, this time on the north of the village. Nicholls stood everybody to. Just then Guri, the cook, returned from the village and told me, 'It is nothing, Mr. General, only a wedding, the bridegroom comes.' All that waste of precious ammunition and grenades to celebrate a wedding. A proper Balkan habit!

Food was getting so short now that the Italian staff of H.Q. had to be sent back to Col. Rossetti at the main Italian camp. Hare would open up H.Q. at Orenje and we would close down Martanesh. I did not like the attention we were receiving from Hun aircraft; the same pilot continued to haunt us.

Gales got up at night, with snow, sleet and lightning. The wireless aerial was blown flat, and night schedules were impossible. With wireless silence by day and storms at night, touch with Cairo could not be kept. The B.B.C. gave news of successful raids on Germany and the crossing of the River Sangro in Italy. News came from Dibra that Haji Lesi had cut the road and knocked out fifteen German lorries. Baba Faja

brought this report, largely because he wanted to ask for some sovereigns to keep his defence platoon going.

I see from my diary that I started the day with a successful lice and flea hunt! It seems awful now to think that we were always with tenants, but the peasants' houses we occupied and visited were crawling with lice, and it was impossible not to pick them up in one's clothing and bedding. On sunny days we stripped and had a hunt, but the relief was only temporary and saved our pride. There was no chance of taking baths and the weather was too cold to strip often. It was lucky that we had been inoculated against typhus—none of us ever went down with it, though the Italians suffered badly and had many deaths. It was strange how quickly, and without fussing unduly about it, we accepted the fact that we were lousy. Rats ran about the room at night and gnawed the beams over our heads. Every house in the village had a dog tied at each corner to keep away thieves, and the noise of barking never stopped. So with lice, rats and dogs our rest was rather disturbed.

We went to inspect some caves as another alternative in case of trouble, but found the climb to them was terribly rough and steep, and already the snow outside them was waist deep. We returned soaked with sweat and rain. We were making plans to go west to Xibra, into the Abas Kupa country, to see how Smyth was getting on and if he had succeeded in persuading Abas to attack the Boche on the Burrelli road with the mortars and arms the November sortie had brought him. Frederick was to come with me to interpret. Nicholls had meantime gone to Orenje to inspect progress in our new home and inspect the new Dropping Zones. I set out in the morning and had cleared the village, climbing up the zig-zag path, when Frederick came panting after me, having dropped off at Baba Faja's to report my departure.

He said that Baba could not take the responsibility of letting me go out of his territory, as we would have to go through hostile Balli villages. I went back to see him, to make it quite clear to him that where I went was my responsibility, and not his, and that I would go into Balli villages without coming to any harm. Eventually he explained that the L.N.C. Council was coming to see me for an important conference, and that he was just going out to meet them. On learning this I changed my plans and decided to wait.

They arrived at 10.30 a.m., the whole lot of them, and crowded round the fire in my room on small stools. Enver spoke. 'We now regard the situation as critical, my General, the Germans have surrounded the area we are in and put a very high price on your head. The presence of H.Q. Allied Mission and L.N.C. Council is a big bait, and traitors will surely give us away. We have decided to move south. Do you agree? We will let you know details of the move later, but would like you to make a preliminary move to Orenje so that we can reach you easily with messages. The main difficulty will be in crossing the main road and the Skumbini River; once those obstacles are behind us we will be on high ground, with friendly villages to feed us, and we can take our time moving south according to the weather.'

I asked how the crossing would be effected, since he had said Chermenika was surrounded with strong forces.

Enver replied, 'Kadri Hoja will distract the Germans by attacking the Balli villages to the east, the Balli will appeal for help, and as the Germans respond, we will skip over the road and river. Our flanks will be guarded and the road blocked on both sides to hold up German patrols and reinforcements. One brigade will form a bridgehead over the river, crossing by the bridge after scuppering the guard. We

will cross by a ford, taking horses and mules with us with all our gear. You need not take food, we will arrange that.'

I suggested we would do better to travel light, without animals, and the smaller the party the better. They did not agree that this was necessary. I offered my staff to help them reconnoitre the river and to plan the operation in detail. My offer was refused, with thanks. 'We have many officers who fought in Spain, who are well versed in all the operations of war. To them a river crossing is nothing.'

Presumably to us it was something—I was sorry later that I had not insisted on Nicholls checking their staff work and Chesshire reconnoitring the river for several nights before we crossed.

The conference over, we had lunch in a more cheerful frame of mind, now that we knew what we were going to do. Two candles helped illuminate the lunch table. Baba Faja sang in his stockinged feet in front of the fire. As the Council departed Nicholls arrived back from Orenje and we immediately got down to informing Cairo of the move and asking Wheeler to look for an H.Q. for us in the south.

Bad news had come from Peshkopeia, how true it was we could not tell. Kemp had bumped into a German in the town, both had fired, both had fallen dead. A second British officer, thought to be Simcox, was followed by Balli to a partisan house and besieged there for six hours. When the partisans had given ground, the British officer had gone out to tell the Balli to cease fire and stop fighting. He had been bayoneted to death. I received confirmation of this story from another source later on, and was even shown photographs supposed to be their bodies. In this type of situation one should never believe anything one hears unless a British officer actually witnesses the incident. The stories told to us were quite false,

although the actual situation down there was alarming.

The news now went from bad to worse. One of our aircraft, carrying three of our officers and two n.c.o.s, had failed to return to base and nothing had been heard of it, Tirana radio afterwards saying that it had caught fire while flying and crashed.

Then Korca, our Albanian, who risked going into El Basan to buy stores for us, was captured by the Germans and taken to Florina Concentration Camp. From there he surprisingly came back safely, and said that he had established his innocence, but the partisans, fearing he had made a pact with the Gestapo, shot him, with his fiancée, just to make sure. Life was becoming tough.

The Germans had begun to use bogus Austrian deserters and Italian soldiers as recruits to the partisans. They spent enough time to locate my H.Q. and the L.N.C. Council when they slipped away by night and made their way back to the plains. The Council had been warned of this danger, but how they were to avoid it was hard to see. They needed recruits, especially trained soldiers, and they took a chance and kept their eyes open. Frederick one day shot three strangers, outside my H.Q., who may or may not have been dangerous. What annoyed us was that he left the bodies lying on the main path into our camp. Nicholls was furious, ordering him to bury them at once, but the only effect it had was to get him to tip them into the stream.

We now moved the bulk of our H.Q. from Martanesh to Orenje, taking various precautions to conceal what we were doing. Chesshire went back there and the wireless remained, continuing working with Cairo. Rumours were spread by us and a general state of uncertainty achieved. Good news came in that Kemp was safe, and Simcox and Riddle with Cen Elesi in the hills. Also the welcome news that a

British Minister had been appointed in Cairo to deal with Albanian affairs—we should now be able to get the propaganda working properly and stand a more even chance of recognition in Balkan affairs, as arranged by the Allies. I determined to return to Egypt to see him.

At Orenje next day the weather was good, and raised our hopes of a sortie by night. In the sunshine a Fiesler Storch aircraft floated slowly above us when, flying in circles to have a good look at us, he suddenly straightened out on a course to let out what looked like puffs of smoke. His object could only be to signal to the artillery for whom he must be spotting. We took cover until the smoke broke up into clouds of pamphlets, written in Albanian and Italian, offering us safe conduct and fair treatment if we would surrender. Roars of laughter and ribald gestures from everyone made me wonder if similar pamphlets in any language are ever of any use. Perhaps we were not yet hard enough pressed. The Fiesler Storch flew off to Biza, where the same antics were gone through, before he crossed the mountain to sprinkle Martanesh with paper and to leave us in no doubt that he knew just where we were. As one battalion of the 2nd Brigade had concentrated already in our village and the others were following it, we would be gone, with any luck, before the net closed round us.

We went out to make contact with the battalion commander. There was great activity, food being cooked, arms being cleaned, guards posted, pickets going up surrounding hills. The peace was quickly disturbed by a flurry of rifle-fire, automatics opening and bombs bursting. We listened to it for a bit and decided that an attack was coming up the valley. Presently the pickets joined in. Nicholls' long legs took one big stride to my two as we made tracks for our house for news. Hare met us and said someone

had died. We had now experienced a wedding, a circumcision and a funeral, all suitably supported by all arms firing for a considerable period and at much expenditure of ammunition.

Kadri Hoja then came in with the battalion commander and his commissar to introduce them and tell us that the feast of Bairam was starting and we must expect a stream of bullets for three days. He hoped that we would receive an air drop as they needed more ammunition. He did not receive well my suggestion that a *feu de joie* should be forbidden and the ammunition kept for battle. We heard from Chesshire that the firing was so wild in his area that he had been confined to the farm for two days! In the process a wild pig had been shot and he sent it across to us to celebrate Bairam. The meat was tough pork, but a change from tough sheep. In the middle of the celebrations, with our muleteers dancing the Corfu dance, Col. Barbacinto, the Italian Chief of Staff, arrived. Tall, good-looking, and, despite the rough conditions, still very smart, at this time he set a good example of keeping up morale. He had refused to accompany his general to Sopot village, which he knew would be inaccessible for the rest of the winter because of the deep snowdrifts. The general had insisted on going there, and, although his duty was to stay with his troops, he had gone off, taking with him the balance of the thousand sovereigns given to him by Seymour for the subsistence of his division. Accordingly the troops were starving, and three had died of hunger the previous night. Barbacinto was sent to Gen. Puccini, another Italian general living in Orenje, and two hundred sovereigns were given to Puccini to feed the soldiery with sheep and bread. There was no work for Barbacinto with us, as we had no liaison with the Italians now that the partisans had taken over our responsibility for them.

My advice to him was to make his way to 'Sea View' and get back to Italy, he was wasted here and we could not feed him.

A busy day followed. Three of our n.c.o.s and one interpreter, who had been separated from their officers in the Dibra battle, now found their way to us. They had to be questioned and reports made on their statements. Then Mustafa Ginishi and one other member of the Council arrived hungry and exhausted, and had to be fed and rested. We all liked Mustafa; he was cheerful and pleasant to talk to, always interesting and frank. The wireless schedules that day brought in a heap of messages that could not be dealt with until Mustafa had gone to sleep. Then there was feverish activity until midnight, with the table covered with signal pads and ciphers, with four of us ciphering and deciphering. The wireless set was still sending as we fell asleep. In the afternoon two messages had come from the Council, the first putting us at twenty-four hours' notice to move south, the second saying we were to rendezvous at Labinot village the following day at 4 p.m.

Orders were given at once for an early start. It was then found that the muleteers from Southern Albania, who should accompany us, had gone to Martanesh and there was not time to get them back. Rather than risk security by taking Shengerj men we decided to go shorthanded and we started for Labinot at 11.30 a.m. A mile out my horse cast first one hind shoe, then another. I went back to the village to get my second horse, only to find it dead lame, having been pricked when it was shod. I decided to take the first charger and have it shod at the first opportunity, if it was still sound. All went well until it was found that Frederick had not brought a guide as ordered, thinking he knew the track. For a while we were completely lost, until Nicholls recognised where he was from an earlier

visit to Labinot. Frederick and I then contacted Enver Hoja at the rendezvous and we went on with his party. Here we found a Partisan battalion in an open field, within sight of the road, standing round a huge bonfire, singing songs at the tops of their voices. It was not our idea of the start of a night operation, when lack of deception and security might cost us our lives and German patrols might see and hear us without difficulty.

After an hour of this the bonfire was extinguished and the steep drop to the road began, over rough going, with a sky covered with cloud but the moon giving enough light. We led the horses on the narrow path. The column kept checking and then hurrying on. At a track junction we stopped to let through a Partisan battalion, which was moving silently, fast and in proper formation. Dogs were barking from every village in the mountains, but as they bark perpetually at night anyway it was not likely that they would give us away. We halted a quarter of a mile from the El Basan-Sturga road as the Council made contact with the guide who was to lead us to the ford. The roar of the River Skumbini came plainly to our ears, in torrent on the far side of the road. The guide said the leading battalion had crossed the river by the bridge and had formed a bridgehead covering the ford. The road was blocked on either side of us by the second battalion. The Balli villages east of us had been attacked an hour ago, much fighting was taking place and the local German battalion had joined in to help the Balli. So far the plan was working admirably.

The sweat dried on us in the night wind, and we shivered as we stood waiting. I got impatient at the delay. It would take all these laden animals a long time to cross the river and climb far enough on the far side to be safe from a follow up. German road patrols were sure to strike the flank protection before long. I went

right down to the road with Enver to see what was happening. It was reported to him that the guide could not find the crossing. The snows had melted higher up and the river was in spate—that was why we had heard the river roaring. Enver flew into a rage and cross-questioned the guide, who admitted that although he had lived by the river all his life he had never had cause to cross it, but he knew peasants did cross in summer. It was clear the crossing had not been reconnoitred. The river was running very fast, with great power, and unless a shallow ford could be found neither man nor horse would keep his feet. Men patrolled the bank, prodding for depth. Eventually a track was found which seemed to cross—the water seemed shallow. A horse and rider went into the water to test it, were swept away at once and were lucky to get out a hundred yards downstream. After this we gave up the attempt and were forced to return to Labinot.

It was 3 a.m. as we started back, and we had only three hours of darkness to get clear of the road. With the attack on the Balli villages by Kadri Hoja, surprise was lost and any patrol would see our tracks down to the river and realise that we had tried to cross, failed, and been forced to go back into Chermenika. The battalion forming the bridgehead would be left in mid-air, as would the flank protection.

As we started the climb back Enver put the blame for the failure on the British Mission.

'If Captain Smiley had not tried to blow that bridge last July we could have taken the horses and mules across it and been up the far side by now,' he said.

'But, Enver,' I replied, 'if you had done what I advised you, and travelled light, without animals, we could still have crossed the bridge. Captain Smiley was quite right to blow it, the German road patrols were crossing it. Also I offered you my staff officers

to help organise the crossing and you refused their help. They would have found out nights before that the crossing was impossible, and not left it to the unproven word of a stupid peasant.'

We were both very tired, cold, hungry and thoroughly cross with each other. Above all, we were very disappointed, and we knew what a serious situation we now faced as a result of this failure to break south. Another attempt would not be possible in force, as the Germans would be alert to it, and the way would be blocked.

The column struggled up the steep hill. If we had been on the other side of the river and the valley none of us would have minded how tired we were, or how far there was to go. I held on to the stirrup of my chestnut horse when I could, but there was seldom room for both of us on the track together. By six o'clock we had completed the worst of the climb and dawn was breaking. I was anxious to get under cover at Labinot before 'Gert and Daisy' arrived on their dawn reconnaissance. No one spoke, we were too weary. In Labinot we were given one room in the Council's house. We saw the horses and mules off-loaded, watered and fed before we went to sleep, lying on the bare boards.

CHAPTER SEVEN

ABOUT 10 a.m. I awoke, alert. The others were sound asleep and snoring. I leaned out of the window and listened. A battle was being fought. This was no wedding celebration or Bairam festivity. It sounded about three or four miles away, down the mountain, in the direction from which we had just come. Two sides were fighting, light machine-guns were answering each other, quick-firing German Spandaus on one side and Brens on the other. Mortars of about two-inch and three-inch size were crumping irregularly. Could it be the bridgehead coming back too late and being intercepted after crossing the road? I woke Frederick and told him to warn the Council. They came and listened, agreed that it was down by the road, too far to surprise us, and that as we could not leave Labinot till dark, we had better stay where we were. In any case, the Germans were unlikely to leave the road except in great force, and then we would get warning. I was not so sure. A force that had bogged the river crossing might be caught unprepared again. The others went back to sleep, but I went on listening to the battle, which went away and then came nearer, flared up and died down. A Fiesler Storch held a watching brief and was relieved by another from Tirana airfield. About 3 p.m. 'Gert and Daisy' appeared, but could do little at the bottom of the narrow valley.

The firing slowly died out. We heard later that Kadri Hoja's partisans, attacking the Balli villages, had a bad time, as the Balli were not surprised and were well armed. As the attack went on the Balli

were joined by the Germans and the pace grew too hot for the partisans, who retired in different directions. The battle we had heard had been between one of these groups and a battalion of Germans who had followed them up across country.

In the evening Enver came up to our room to discuss plans. He was very apologetic for the lack of food and amenities, and was ashamed of the failure of the river crossing. He had issued orders that the river was to be searched for two nights for the crossing, while we remained at Labinot for another attempt. German reaction was also to be watched. We went down to the communal room, talked and drank raki. After a while choruses began and the well-known repertoire of Partisan songs, melancholy and decisive, were sung. An Italian opera singer was then produced, with a magnificent bass voice, powerful and well trained, who sang from every well-known opera, and was glad of some attention and applause. The party broke up when he had finished—no one could come up to his standard, and we drifted away to bed, to sleep soundly.

In the morning my horse was shod. Despite the heavy day's work and the night march down the mountain track to the road and back, without hind shoes, he had remained sound after shoeing. I rode him round the Labinot paths to make sure. There were two fine German chargers just arrived from Tirana, where they had been captured from German officers hacking in the country. With them had come some new breeches and a new pair of brown field boots for Enver. The German officers had presumably been shot in an ambush, but we did not ask about them. The chargers, one black and one chestnut, were in very good form, well fed and exercised—they made our hard-worked animals look very badly done by. Their saddles and bridles were well made and fitted properly. I rode both chargers in turn, they had

light mouths, were responsive to the aids, had plenty of fire in them and carried themselves proudly. I dreaded to think what they would be like in a short time—covered in saddle and girth galls, hard in the mouth and generally ill-treated. They were too heavily built for mountain work and their feet were too big over rocks and mountain paths. It was sad to think of their capture.

As we were here for another thirty-six hours, a runner was sent back to Hare for food, spare mules and some of the Italian specialists, with a signal in verse, after Louis McNeice's poem, 'Bagpipe Music,' which went:

It's no go the Merry-go-round,
It's no go the muck-up,
We've failed to cross Skumbini Riv,
There's been a proper fugg up!

The sun had broken through the clouds, but the wind was very much colder and had dried the ground, so there was a chance that the river might be falling enough to allow a crossing, provided that the ford could be found. Without any warning our first echelon arrived, Chesshire, Sgts. Melrose and Chisholm, with Italian and Albanian kitchen staff, plus many extra animals carrying spare stores. Our plan had been to move in two parties, with Chesshire commanding the second group following us after a forty-eight hour interval. Having heard nothing to stop him, he came on to Labinot and ran into us. His remarks, on hearing the Skumbini failure, were very typical of him. 'The silly sods—what are we going to do now, Brig.?'

'I suspect we're going back to Orenje, Jim, I can't see the Boche letting us cross now. We're waiting for Enver to make his mind up,' I replied. 'It's no go the muck up.'

I was particularly anxious to get south, as a signal

had come from Cairo agreeing that I should go out to Egypt to see the new Minister for Albania, and give him the latest news of developments. We were trying to arrange a pick-up by seaplane on Lake Ochrid's western coastline, north of Pogradec. A covering party on the shore could keep off the Bulgarian motor-boats and block the coast road, north and south. In any case, the pick-up should be over, with the plane airborne, before any interception could be effective. It was hoped to get a light seaplane across from Italy, such as the Italians used regularly. Failing that, there was always 'Sea View,' although it would be farther to reach than Lake Ochrid. We intended to reconnoitre the coast of the lake as we went south. I had told Enver I was going out for a short while to make our position clear, to arrange for better stores and to explain at first hand what was needed.

While we were waiting for news from the Skumbini, Enver and I had several long discussions on the future. In one of these I asked him straight out, 'Is the L.N.C. already Communist and do you intend to establish a Communist rule, based on Moscow, if you gain power after the war?'

He was very careful to dodge my question and avoid saying that they were Communists. 'Our object is to defeat Fascism, whether that is as shown by the Germans or by the Balli.'

'The L.N.C. organisation is imitating the Russian system, with its political commissars,' I pointed out.

He replied, 'Our system has proved successful in Albania, as well as in Russia. Russia is one of our allies, so why should we not copy from them? The Partisan salute of the clenched fist, "Death to the Fascists," with the reply, "Long Live the People," has spread throughout the country and expressed the will of the people.'

Enver got very intense and excited as he talked. He was a big man, and impressive in his earnestness. He told me much of conditions in Albania in the past—of the poor in the towns, of the peasants in the mountains, of the blood feuds between families, of the lack of railways, and of the undeveloped state of the country, which had many assets, such as oil, timber and chrome. For much of his talk he used French, which he spoke very well, but I noticed that he always lapsed into Albanian whenever politics were being discussed, and then Frederick had to translate.

The Council shared the same food and conditions with their men, whether in the field or in billets, and although Enver had a good horse to ride he never rode it on the march, when long distances were covered. He had no time for King Zog, who, he said, had deserted his people when they were threatened with invasion, and had taken millions in gold from the country to support his wife and sisters in luxury in France and England.

While we were talking we strolled through the fields outside the house, past the cherry orchards, over to the rock from which gushed a stream of ice-cold water. This was the first chance I had of talking to Enver alone, and really getting to know him. He had many plans how the country could be improved after the war, even to building tourist hotels. His travels in France and Belgium had broadened his mind and given him initiative. He was anxious to know when I would make up my mind which party to back. I had told him over and over again that while there was civil war going on I would back no party, but that I hoped that he would make a full-scale effort against the Germans, and leave any quarrel with the Balli until the Germans were beaten. In the spring, when the pace quickened, there would be less time for

quarrelling, and only hard fighting against the remains of the Axis would count.

We spent another two days at Labinot, days which passed slowly but which were well worth while, as they were passed in close proximity to the Council and allowed both sides to see the good points in the other. We were surprised how humorous they could be. Dr. Dishnica had a very shrewd wit and told the raciest of stories in beautiful French, with appropriate gestures. He had been a medical student in France, and consequently became Minister of Health in the first Government after the war. The only Albanian we had known really well before this was Frederick Nosi, whose English was very good, as he had been taught by Mrs. Hasluck when she was in El Basan, and he had learnt English manners and customs from her. Frederick was constantly with me, and an intelligent and good companion he made. He had been to Glasgow as leader of a Boy Scout troop to an International Jamboree, and was the only Albanian we met who had been to Britain. I think he enjoyed being with us, and being able to exercise his English. He also had a good sense of humour, and a typical Albanian big nose of unusual shape. It was awkward that his uncle, Lef Nosi, who had brought him up, had worked with the Germans as President of the National Assembly. We had difficulties with Frederick from time to time, but, on the whole, we could not have had a better liaison officer, and nor could we have done the work we did or got to know the country and the people as quickly as we did without him.

It was now decided to return to Orenje for a few days before making another attempt on the river. Labinot was a bit too close to the main road for our liking and there was constant sound of firing coming from it. The river had gone down and the crossing was

now possible, except that the neighbourhood had been thoroughly stirred by the attacks on the Balli villages, and German road patrols were active.

An early-morning start was made, with an advance party under Chesshire and our main party an hour and a half behind. The horses were full of life, and seemed to realise they were returning to their warm stables under our house, where we could hear them stamping and kicking all night.

On arrival we were thrilled to hear that one aircraft had arrived the night before, but our joy was short-lived when we heard the load—a small mail, lots of explosives and grenades, no food, no ammunition, a few Sten guns, some winter special clothing. Kadri Hoja, who was hoping for arms, battledress, great-coats and medical stores for the local hospital, was very rude about it to Hare, and stumped off in a rage. He returned later to paint a very black picture to me of the situation locally. The Germans were in the Balli villages below and to the east of us; there was nothing to stop them walking right in on us. The Partisan 2nd Brigade had withdrawn to the high ground above Shengerj, the Italians with them. Apart from them, the partisans in Chermenika had scattered. This seemed a prudent time to issue out some of the newly arrived stores. I told Kadri Hoja that he could take away the small quantity of Stens and the grenades, we would keep the explosives as they could not handle them. He stood up and said, very rudely, 'We will not accept them. In principle they are not enough. The aeroplane was given up to letters for the Mission and nice warm clothing for them, while my men are in rags, with bare feet, while our wounded are dying for lack of medicines.'

I kept my temper and was patient with him. 'Kadri,' I said, 'that aircraft was only one of several due to come to us. The others may not have got

through, but they will come, and all the rest of our demand will be dropped. This is only a first instalment—take it and issue it to your men. Those Sten guns and grenades will kill many Germans.'

'I will not take it,' he shouted, 'it is not enough.'

I began to get cross, which I had not wanted to do. 'Kadri, do you mean to tell me that you will not take weapons when we are threatened by Germans? If you do not take them, we cannot carry them. We may not remain here much longer. Will you let them fall into the Germans' hands, to be given to the Balli?'

He stood there stupidly saying, 'In principle they are not enough. I will not take them.'

'Damn your childish principles!' I said. 'A British R.A.F. crew have risked their lives flying into these mountains to bring the weapons to you. We have come to help you fight the Germans. Do you still refuse to take them?'

'Yes,' he said, 'I refuse.'

'Very well,' I replied, 'I will report your stupidity to the Council, and I hope they shoot you.' I was very angry, and sent him away.

Both the officers and n.c.o.s were delighted that I had at last expressed some of our feelings about the stupidity of the partisans. I had gone out of my way to be patient with them, but there is a limit to patience and this was no time to fool about. On the way back to Orenje we had met a small group of wounded partisans returning from battle, and they complained that they had run out of ammunition. When one thought of the waste of bullets at Bairam and at weddings it was little wonder they ran out.

Nicholls ordered that all the Italians with us, the muleteers and the kitchen staff, should be given a Sten gun and six grenades each, but even then there were many left over. Then we went into the house and let our wrath evaporate reading letters from home,

letters which did much to cheer us up. We had never before had mail delivered by parachute. There were some *Blackwood's magazines*, too, with Bernard Ferguson's tales of his Chindits across the Chindwin, a huge tin of Groppi's Cairo sweets from Maggie, and some water bottles full of whisky. It was a good mail. One of the n.c.o.s had no letters, having only recently joined us, so he demanded to read everyone else's mail, but only got one taker, and he said that was pretty dull. Chesshire had stacks of letters from a girl friend and decided to read one a day for a month. Hare had some good books. The table was loaded with weekly papers.

Nicholls had organised a watching and listening post in the hills around us, covering the tracks from the east, with patrols linking up with them. We stood-to for two hours at dawn, nothing happened and the country was quiet, it was bright and sunny, but bitterly cold.

Another quiet day went by, and then news came that the Germans had started opening the mountain road from El Basan, which led past the entrance to the plain of Biza, and would allow them to start drives from several different directions. A Fiesler Storch came over after breakfast, waggled his wings, and dropped more leaflets. It had hardly departed when Kadri Hoja came to advise me to go to a certain house in Gurakuq to meet the Council for discussions. I rode over at once with Frederick and Sgt. Melrose. The owner of the house was a Mussulman, so we took off our boots and left them outside, and sat on mats awaiting the arrival of the Council. About one o'clock a messenger came from Nicholls to say that the Council had arrived at Orenje, as they had considered Gurakuq was too dangerous. We hastily put on our boots and rode up the mountain again. The country was peaceful, except that we had heard since early morning the

sound of motor columns passing over the mountain road in steady procession.

The Council was in our house, eating apples, pears and nuts and drinking red wine. They had no news to give me, except that the situation was steadily getting worse. With that, a report came in that the Boche were in Zdrashe, one hour away. It was time to move. The Council, taking me with them, rode ahead, straight up the mountain into the beech forest. It was falling dark as we went. We joined up with others from H.Q. We had sent to Cairo, early that day, a very urgent signal for food, weapons and clothes. It was hardly dark before aircraft were over us, winking down the signal of the day, but we could not accept them now that we had left the area of the Dropping Zone, and had to continue climbing while they circled, continuously signalling. Villages were burning that had been fired by the Germans in their advance. The aircraft would examine the fires and return to the Dropping Zone. We could hear the Germans shooting at them. In all, we counted four aircraft, and saw them as they flew past us. This was indeed bad luck, after so many nights spent waiting for them in vain. There would have been no need for Kadri to have had principles about this drop.

We continued on the march, leading our horses, in the dark woods, in good going through a ride thick with the fallen leaves of many years. In seven hours we reached our hide-out. I had a bad headache, and felt very cold. It was one in the morning and we lay down in the wet leaves and tried to sleep. Hare and Sgt. Chisholm had been left behind to intercept the mule column, led by Trayhorn, and hide the mules and stores in a covered place. Our food, kit and explosives were all on the mules' backs, as well as the wireless sets, so that if they went astray we were left with what we stood up in.

Cheshire and Kadri went back to find Hare and the mule train at dawn, to lead them to a new hide away from the track. It was bitterly cold—we could not light a fire for fear of the smoke being spotted from the air. We walked up and down, waiting for food and news. Cheshire came back, having found Hare but not the mule train. I sent him back to tell Hare to abandon the mule train and come in to us. Dark had fallen when Mico arrived saying that a German column had passed through an ambush he had set on the main Martanesh track, but that he had not attacked them for fear of giving away our position, which was, perhaps, as well, as on further interrogation the German column turned out to be our mule train. Trayhorn had evidently missed the cross-tracks where we had turned into the forest, and had gone on to Martanesh with all our food, such as it was.

We slept very little, huddled around fires in a hollow. By now 160 people had gathered in this group, mostly partisans and Italians, and a considerable number of animals, even without our mule train. The problem of getting food and fodder was a big one, and limited the time we could go on hiding there. In two days we had only had a small plate of beans and some maize flour.

‘Enver, we must make an attempt to break out to the east with a small selected party from the Council and my H.Q.,’ I said. ‘No animals should be taken; we should travel light so that we can turn south once through the cordon, and skirt the western shores of Lake Ochrid until we reach the Partisan force H.Q. in the south. I will leave a rear party to follow us later, and Kadri Hoja must take care of them; it is his country. There is no time for delay and discussion—you must make your minds up to move at once. I will take with me Col. Nicholls, Frederick, Sgt. Smith, and Bektash as a porter. He is young and strong and

will be useful if anyone is sick or hurt. The Council should only take five of its most important members. Our whole party should not exceed twelve, which is the most we can feed from villages en route without being discovered and betrayed.'

Enver agreed, and said we would move at 7 p.m. He postponed this till 9 p.m., when he said the guide had not arrived, and we could not start till dawn. Heavy rain fell all night. We started at dawn. There seemed to be a platoon with us, whom I took to be a protection until we broke through the cordon. Enver, questioned about them, said they must come the whole way with us, as we passed through Balli country and could not risk capture. I protested vigorously, and pointed out that twelve of us could slip through unseen, but thirty-five was too many, both for feeding and concealment, and we could never hope to get through with all this crowd. Surely the lesson of the Skumbini failure was that there were too many of us attempting to make a difficult crossing? Enver would not change his plan, and said it was essential to take the defence platoon.

We halted after a few hours' marching, high up the mountain and very exposed to the driving rain, while the Council tried to contact Baba Faja, who was said to be hiding hereabouts. There was no food. The five of us had one packet of chocolate each as an emergency ration, and Nicholls had a tin of soup. We lit a fire after dark and stood around it, warming first one side of us, while the other side froze, then turning round to warm the frozen side. The night passed very slowly and wearily. In the morning, at 9 a.m., Kadri came back with two Albs, dragging a sheep, which Bektash slaughtered and cooked by running a great stake through it and hanging it over a wood fire, while one man stood at each end of the stake to keep the sheep turning slowly for even cooking. The entrails

of liver, kidneys, sweetbreads and heart were cut up and spiked on to a small stake, were wrapped round with small intestines and grilled till they were well cooked, when they were sliced on the stake and pulled off and eaten. The slices are known as 'cookerettes.' The sheep was hacked up and distributed. We were very hungry, and had no difficulty getting through our portion. Corn bread, which we always found dull and unpalatable, accompanied the meat. It was baked in large, flat, circular cakes, made from mealies and corncobs, and was the staple diet of the peasants. The main trouble with meat cooked and served like this is that it sticks between one's teeth and is so difficult to dislodge that it makes the gums sore and inflamed. The corn bread passes through one too readily.

The cooking took ages, and we were not fed and ready to move off before afternoon. We continued to climb until we were walking through snow a foot deep. The guide was not certain of the way with the track hidden, and, after casting about hopelessly in different directions, he had to admit that he did not know where he was. By now it was very nearly dark, so Kadri Hoja took the lead, and we plunged into the forest. The hillsides were very steep, and everybody was slipping and falling perpetually; it was impossible to keep one's feet on the snow-covered slope and only the trees kept us from rolling a long way down. The exertion of moving through the snow and snowdrifts, picking oneself up after falls to stagger on again, soon exhausted us. We were wet through with sweat, despite the cold.

About midnight a halt was called—it was useless going on any more in these conditions; we had missed the village we were making for and would have to wait for daylight. A mixture of rain and sleet began to fall on us as we collected in a small hollow. If we

could get a fire to light here it would not be seen. Bektash and Veli, our two Albanian porters, succeeded somehow, though how it was done in the pouring rain and snow, with wet wood, was a mystery. Before long a huge fire was burning, with the same circle standing round it in slush six inches deep. We took it in turns to lie down near the fire—we had to sleep—but one's side got so wet and one's back so cold it was better to stand up and slumber on one's feet.

Great excitement was caused by one of the partisans, who had several grenades hanging from his belt by their pins, suddenly shouting that one had dropped in the fire. We all scattered away from the flames, hid behind a huge beech tree or flung ourselves in the snow. There was the crash of the explosion, blazing logs and branches shot everywhere, but miraculously no one was hurt. The fire was gathered together again, the circle reassembled in the slush, the flicker of the flames lighted up the hollow, and snow fell to the ground from the fir trees. It continued to rain hard all night.

Kadri left at first light to try to find the path, and returned in two hours to lead the way. After four hours' hard marching we came to the outskirts of Okshtun village, and hid in a wood of holly trees, while contacts were made, and we could be led safely into the outskirts of the village, where we were distributed amongst several houses. Fifteen people crowded into the upper room of our cottage, and rapidly began to take off their sopping clothes and boots. A log fire was soon blazing and places in the room detailed by Enver. Nicholls and I were given one side of the fire with Sgt. Smith and we were soon fast asleep on the boards, covered by a quilt well furnished with lice, but as we were already covered with them it made no difference. About 8 p.m. we were wakened for food—roast chicken with nut sauce. The meal

would have made a good Biblical picture, the circle of men lying on the floor around a huge dish, which was placed on a low circular table. We ate with wooden spoons from the big dish, and managed the chicken with our fingers. From the rafters above us hung thousands of golden corn-cobs, illuminated by the firelight, and from the stable beneath us came the low of sheep and clonk of sheep bells. We remembered that it was Christmas Eve.

The intention was to rest here forty-eight hours after the rigours of the march of the past few days. The raki was circulating and morale rising, when the Boche were reported halted two kilometres away. We were close to the Sturga-Dibra road, where we should break out of the encirclement. Enver decided to leave in the morning, while I was all for staying put for another twenty-four hours. Enver said it would be too dangerous, there were Balli in the village, we must leave at 4 a.m.

We lay down to sleep, with the owner of the house, an old peasant, sitting by the fire to keep watch while we slept; he was to wake us at three in the morning. I had purposely kept my boots away from the fire—they are easier to put on when they are wet than if they are hard and dry, apart from the risk of burning them. While I was sleeping, the old man tried to be helpful and put them close to the fire. I woke to find both boots like boards, and I had a job to get them on.

We started at 6.30 a.m. and slipped away from the village without disclosing our destination, there following a long steady climb to the top of the ridge overlooking the valley through which the Dibra road ran. The track led down the mountainside, wound across a broad plain and into a forest which spread over the hills overlooking the village of Khorishte. The Council started off down the path.

‘Surely, Enver,’ Nicholls asked, ‘you are not going

to cross that plain in daylight? We would do better to keep along the ridge for another mile and then descend and cross through the wood, which hides the road as it bends.' He had been examining the lie of the land through his field glasses, and we could avoid being seen the whole way across.

'This is a regular crossing place of the partisans—it is well known to us and we have never come to harm here, it will be nothing if we are seen, just another partisan party,' said Enver.

With the activity of the Germans at Dibra and all round Chermenika it was madness to cross at this place where road traffic might interrupt us at any moment; we plodded down the steep path to the plain, and as we came out from the shelter of a shoulder of the hill, a Todt organisation working party of eight men could be seen repairing a culvert, four of them carrying a large log. We halted and watched them from cover. I pressed Enver to attack the Germans and capture them. Enver refused, and said we would cross the plain ignoring them; we outnumbered them by eight to one, and they could do nothing to us.

'Except report accurately our numbers and description, and where we are going. We do not want the Germans to know we have broken out, it is asking for trouble,' I said.

It was useless arguing with him. Over the plain we went, in small groups in extended order. It was at this moment that the sole of my right boot came off, it was charred right through and must have been burnt during the night, when the old peasant moved it near to the fire. It was not going to be too easy walking now in snow and over rocks, but it had got to be done.

We were just entering the scrub on the far side when accurate rapid fire was opened on us by the Germans behind.

'Enver, let us go back and mop them up,' I urged.

But it was no good. We turned off the path and climbed a very steep mountainside, through the forest, up rough going, a lot of the time on hands and knees, but in doing it we were probably avoiding an ambush on the track farther on. The forest gave way to an area of volcanic pits, the ground pock-marked with them, quite 100 feet in depth, forcing us round the edge and making us scramble over large boulders and rocks. By dusk we had come in view of Khorishte below us. We hid up while two of the Council went down to arrange shelter and food. It was intensely cold as the sweat dried on us. Nicholls and I huddled together for warmth and broached my small flask of cherry brandy, which had been kept for months for just such an emergency. We solemnly took a swig at it and wished each other a Happy Christmas! In the open, in intense cold, at 6,000 feet!

We did not remain there for long, it was too cold on the exposed face of the mountain, so we pulled back into a hollow, lit a fire and crouched over it to thaw out. I examined my boots at the firelight, the right half sole had dropped right off, but the heel and instep were firm. The left boot was sound. The ball of the right foot and the toes were resting on the snow, and the thick sock was already in tatters and my foot was frozen. Sgt. Smith was in little better plight. He had swapped his Army boots some days previously for a good-looking pair of captured black riding boots, which looked very smart and gave him the impression that they would be weatherproof, but after Smith had marched through the snow and slush he could not pull them off his feet, and we had to cut them off him and turn them into ankle boots.

At two in the morning our billeting party came back from the village with the president, with the news that the Germans were waiting below for us, after appreciating that we were trying to go south by the

lake, the working party at the culvert having reported us. We cursed Enver for not having scuppered them. Now no one in the village would risk helping us with shelter or food, and it was no use continuing in that direction, with the Boche alive to our intention. We would have to return to Chermenika and try in another direction. Having broken out this time it was a bitter blow to have to turn back; we could so easily have remained undiscovered. No skill on the German's part had beaten us, either at Skumbini or here, but just failure to be careful.

It seemed that it was now essential for me to get back to Cairo to explain the situation, and make fresh plans for the spring. If Frederick and I were to slip away alone we could make our way south, marching by night with map and compass, and lying up by day. Two of us could get food where thirty-five could not. I calculated that we could join Wheeler in three or four days.

I put this plan to Enver. He was angry and dead against it.

'You are deserting us in our time of trouble, my General,' he said.

'No,' I replied, 'my Chief of Staff will remain with you. I came to Albania to help defeat the Germans, but at the moment nothing is being achieved and we are being chased round the mountains, entirely through Partisan foolishness.'

By now we were both very angry. Enver went on:

'I am responsible for you, my General, you are as a guest in my house. Should anything happen to you, the blame will fall on me, I will be disgraced and the Partisan cause will suffer.' He went on arguing like this for an hour. In the end he said, 'If you persist in going I cannot allow Frederick to go with you as interpreter.' He had me there; without Frederick I could not enter a village for food or rest; by myself or

with Nicholls we would run the risk of being shot for the gold we carried as cash to pay our way. There was also the fact that my boot had collapsed and my foot might become frostbitten at any moment.

Reluctantly, I gave way. I think Nicholls was glad, he did not want to be parted from me; he was not well enough to take the responsibility of the Mission, and already I was getting worried that he would not stick this hardship much longer. His feet were badly blistered from the long marching with wet boots, and the blisters had all gone septic. In addition, his circulation was poor, so that his feet and hands were covered with chilblains, which were splitting and also going septic. All this on top of the dysentery which had weakened him made conditions very trying for him. He was anxious not to be taken prisoner, as he had been in the organisation in London, and knew much of the secret side of Special Forces. He knew what the German Gestapo were capable of doing to captured S.O.E. officers, and to what limits they went in interrogating prisoners. I had found him taking benzedrine on the march to keep himself awake and had cursed him soundly, as I was frightened of the effect that drugs might have on him in his exhausted state. We had got to know each other very well in Albania and were such firm friends that it was distressing to see him gradually becoming a sick man without being able to help him in any way. He often spoke to me of the possibility of getting out. I promised that he would be sent down to 'Sea View' at the first opportunity. By now it was plain to both of us that he was not really suited for this rough and tumble life, big though his heart was and willing as he could be. Disappointed as I was at not getting out, I was glad to be with him at this hard time.

CHAPTER EIGHT

WE STARTED marching at dawn on the return journey. Heavy rain was still falling. Guides were leading us, and like all guides we experienced, they lost themselves with great frequency. On one occasion, after an hour's passage through heavy rocks and boulders, we found ourselves back at a place we had passed an hour before, with the only good result that a peasant who had been bringing bread from the village overtook us.

At this stage we insisted that we should lead the column with map and compass. The partisans were as suspicious of the compass as we were of the guides, with the difference that the compass led us correctly.

The descent to the Dibra road was very difficult, the ground was slippery with frozen snow and rain, one after another we crashed on to our backs and tobogganed down the mountainside until we fetched up against a rock or a tree. Smith's riding boots were quite unsuitable for the task, and he spent more time on his back than on his feet.

This time the road was crossed with great care, in a covered stretch of country. We waited for dusk to fall and then rushed it. The climb up the far side was the worst we had faced, the path was very steep and slippery, a fine driving rain swept past us and froze on the first thing it touched. Such conditions are what the meteorologists call a gelled frost. Ice built up on the exposed side of branches to a depth of two inches, when the weight of the ice would break the branch. As we climbed into the wind, ice formed a solid sheet on our clothes and built up on our moustaches and eyebrows. We climbed and panted, fell flat on our

faces, were hauled to our feet, repeated the sequence over and over again. In the diary Nicholls afterwards described the climb as 'a severe trial of physical and moral strength and endurance.' At 9 p.m. the guides admitted they had once more lost themselves. We had taken them to the road crossing by compass, when they had said they recognised the country and could lead us back to Okshtun. We now decided to halt for the night—too exhausted to go farther, but whether a fire could be lighted in this frost was another matter. Without it we would all be badly frostbitten; my right foot in the broken boot was already quite numb, and our clothes were standing out from our bodies like hard boards.

Bektash and Veli, with a candle from Nicholls' haversack, some sheets of paper from a notebook, a few matches and some twigs, once again achieved the impossible and got a fire started. We took it in turns to blow it alive while the ice melted on the wood undoing all our good work. Sgt. Smith fell asleep as he was kneeling and blowing, and had to be roughly handled to wake him up.

- All night we kept the fire going, searching for wood beneath the carpet of snow, dragging in logs and sitting on them around the fire until they were wanted for burning. There was no food. The maize bread had allowed only one lump each early that night, and it was soon eaten. This was our worst night, although the others had been close runners-up.

We went on at dawn. The gelled frost had continued all night, and did not let up. For the first two hours we were still climbing, with Nicholls leading by compass, till we reached the crest and identified our position. Then began the long descent through deep snow on the far side of the mountain, with a strong wind and cold so intense that we burnt our hands touching the metal of our weapons. Our feet were

completely numb. At midday we reached Okshtun, and bundled into a house, though not the same one we had left on Christmas Day. By now the village was frightened to shelter us, but our peasant host had little option, and we were sound asleep before he could do anything about it.

The next morning great pressure was put on Enver by the president of the village to move on, as Germans were expected that day, and he did not want to be compromised. Enver asked me, 'Will you risk staying in the village while we go on? There are only four of you and you will be easy to hide and feed, and Col. Nicholls needs rest. We will lie up on the high ground above Kostenje and set about making contacts to break out between El Basan and Tirana. In a week or ten days we will send back for you to continue the march. For the moment, the fewer mouths I have to feed the better.' I agreed at once. We would be thoroughly rested by the time he sent for us.

Kadri Hoja was sent to negotiate with our original house-owner, and came back to say he would take us. We marched out with the remainder, and, after going a short distance with them, broke off and quietly made our way back to the house.

Here the atmosphere was friendly. We were given the upstairs room, a fire was lighted, mats were laid on the baked earth floor and quilts were brought as covers. The room had no windows, but an arrow slit in one wall. It was almost dark except for the light from the fire and pinewood chips burning in the walls. A door gave on to a small balcony, which was boarded in and had a hole in the floor. This was the lavatory. Our host reminded us that they were not paper users, and it was essential that we should burn any we used for toilet purposes, and not drop it through the hole, where it would be seen on the dung-hill below and

give us away. It was as well he warned us—our security measures might not have gone that far.

We cleaned ourselves up as well as we could, shaved again, washed our socks, what remained of them, and had a louse hunt in front of the fire. Two meals a day were produced, both the same, a mess of beans and corn bread. We bought some quinces from our host, cut them into slices, poured pek-mess fruit juice on them, and boiled the lot in a rusty tin. The result was delicious, but, coming on top of the beans and corn bread, made our visits to the balcony frequent. But better was to follow next day, when our host bought a kid, potatoes, some walnuts, more quinces and pek-mess, and some paraffin for a lamp. As our diet improved, some raki saw in the New Year.

I turned doctor and cleaned up Nicholls' septic feet and hands with hot water and a little iodine, and covered them with small strips of Elastoplast. They were not healthy, and what they needed was rest and treatment in a proper hospital, not the life we were leading. However, there was no chance of this at the moment, and the best we could do was to patch him up, rest him whenever possible, and evacuate him to Italy at the first opportunity.

Sgt. Smith now alarmed me. 'Brig.,' he said, 'I think I've broken a bone low down in my spine. I fell so often coming down that hill. I must have hit a rock. It's very painful and throbbing.'

I told him to drop his pants and let me have a look at it. I bent him over in the firelight, and there, between the cheeks of his buttocks, was a blind boil, the size of a Victoria plum.

'It's only a boil, Smith—I'll soon fix that.'

Sgt. Smith was so relieved to hear that it wasn't a fractured vertebra he started pulling up his trousers, but I ordered them down again. He was put close to the fire, where the heat could cook up the boil,

Nicholls then held his head as he bent over, and I slashed the boil with a razor blade! Smith gave a great shout, and blood poured from him. The operation was most successful. The wound was also covered with Elastoplast.

After a week of this confined existence we began to get bored. It was the darkness that got us down, and not being able to read. The peasant and his sons, who were so security-minded for the first few days, with one of them always covering the entrance to the house, now began to get careless, all of them visiting other villages, leaving us unguarded. It was about midday of the eighth day, our luncheon cooking, when strange voices were heard beneath us, then steps ascending the stairs, the trapdoor was pushed open and four armed Albanians came into our room. We had the advantage, as we were used to the light and they were not. We jumped for our machine carbines and stood at the ready. Frederick asked them what they wanted. They asked for the host. Frederick said he was out. They stood staring at us for some time, then went out. I gave the order to abandon the house at once. The four men were Nationalists or Balli, and had not liked the look of us. Only the fact that we were armed and ready to shoot had saved us. The elder son returned at that moment and confirmed our suspicion. In ten minutes we were out of the house and climbing hard straight up the mountain through the forest to the rendezvous above Kostenje given us by the Council. The son accompanied us.

After six hours' climbing we met a partisan of Baba Faja's cheta, who guided us to the hide-out where the Council were still hidden, and we were overjoyed to find that Chesshire and Hare, whom we had not seen since we had left Biza with the Council, had joined them. They told us that after living on mules and horses for food, they had been shot up without warning

by machine-guns, and, in the subsequent confusion, had swum a river and hidden in a cave with Roberto, the Italian interpreter, and the Italian sergeant-major. They had then gone to Martanesh, to find our house blown up by our own explosives, with all other houses in the vicinity burnt. They hid in the wireless hut up the hill, having bought some food, and were then able to get a peasant to guide them to Baba Faja, above Kostenje. Roberto had been most useful, as he spoke English, having been head waiter of an hotel in Florence, and also Albanian, as he had been in Italian Intelligence in Tirana.

We huddled in the crowded sheep-fold with them and told them of our failure to break out, and all that had happened to us. Food with them was fairly plentiful: sheep, bread, honey, cheese. We visited Baba Faja in the house he was occupying, told him of our encounter with the four men and our rapid departure from the village, and asked him to let Enver Hoja know. He promised to tell him, and we went back to the sheep-fold.

The morning was sunny and allowed us to wash and delouse again. I was lucky, too, in getting a good pair of marching boots from one of the mulemen, who was returning south and did not want to be seen wearing British Army boots. My foot was in poor shape, and the new boots had only just come in time. But I was lucky in having a good circulation, I had no chilblains and with any luck my foot would recover, now it was protected from snow, cold and wet.

Our southern mulemen, who were attempting to get back to their homes in the south, had been unable to get through the cordon south of Labinot and had come back. Baba Faja now directed them to Tirana, told them to change their battledress for peasants' clothes and make their way independently. They were a good lot and we were sorry to see them go.

As day went the sky clouded over and looked angry, the wind began to increase and before long it was blowing at gale force. Snow was driven through the gaps between the planks of the sheep-fold, but, nevertheless, we were lucky not to be in the open. Thirteen of us lay huddled on the ground in the dark. The gale increased in strength. I had fortunately brought a camelhair balaclava cap with me, and I lived by day and night in it, with the roll-down tucked into my battledress collar, with my ears covered and only a small portion of my face exposed. My short, fleece-lined jerkin had been left with my mule in the first confusion at Orenje. It would have been ideal for this life, light on the march, close fitting and reasonably waterproof. A greatcoat was too hot for heavy walking over the mountains, and when it became rain-soaked it was impossibly heavy. I wore a raincoat, which kept out most of the wind and rain, but was very cold, and apt to soak my battledress with condensation. Chesshire had retained his tropical coat, a big heavy fleece-lined coat, designed for static sentries in Arctic conditions. We never discovered how he had walked from Martanesh in it, but suspected two mulemen had carried it.

It was a blessing now, and three of us slept under it, using it as a blanket.

The morning came slowly with the gale still raging. The sheep-fold was a wintry scene, snow having penetrated right through it and covered the sleeping figures. There was no point in doing anything but sleep for most of them. I went out to Baba Faja's house for news, and found Enver with most of the Council sitting there. There was no news, and not much likelihood of there being any in this storm, as everything was at a standstill, with the snow lying three feet deep. I went back to the sheep-fold. Hare had bought some quinces and walnuts from an Italian

woman in Kostenje, and these were shared round. Another night passed, while the blizzard continued. A fire had been kept going to keep the hut warm, but the acrid smoke had given several people sore eyes.

I went to see Baba Faja and told him he must do something to improve our living conditions; while he and the Council were living in houses, the British Mission were in a sheep-fold, crowded with mulemen. For a night it would have been all right, but for several days it was not. Baba Faja removed himself to another house and made room for us in the one he had been living in. The mulemen remained in the sheep-fold. This was a great improvement. If we could find some food that would satisfy us we could endure the blizzard and the discomfort, but quinces and apples were not filling. The Council were responsible for feeding us, but were making no attempt to do so, and thinking they were hard pressed in this weather, we had not worried them, but in the house Baba Faja had vacated we saw an ample supply of bread, cheese, chickens and dried fruit being removed, so we lodged a protest immediately. We were given one loaf! Examining the dark rooms by torchlight we discovered two chickens roosting in the rafters. They were caught, plucked, roasted and eaten. When the Commissar came back, he searched for them in vain. Even after eating them and making soup out of the remains we were still hungry.

The wind continued to howl and flurries of snow came in every time the door opened. Frederick told me, 'All the Albanians are saying that our present plight is all your fault. If you had denounced the Balli when you should have done, this situation would never have arisen.' I answered somewhat roughly: 'You Albs find it convenient to forget that I persuaded the Balli to fight side by side with the L.N.C., that the L.N.C., after their original promise to fight together

with the Balli, went back on their word and swore to wipe out the Balli, even while they were still fighting the Germans. They also forget the failure they made to cross the Skumbini River, and the mistake made crossing the Dibra road. That they should now blame me for their own foolishness is typically Balkan.'

To cheer us up we sent Veli and Dimitri into the blizzard, with some sovereigns, to try to buy a goat or a sheep and some bread. They disappeared down the path leading to Kostenje, the snow swirling all round them. Hardly had they gone than Enver appeared with the Council, ready for marching. We jumped up, thinking we were off.

Enver was full of charm and good spirits. 'My General, I have heard of a possible way out. I am taking the Council two days' march away, to a hide. From there we will be able to make arrangements more easily and quickly. By splitting our party in two halves feeding will be easier. As soon as we are ready I will send for you to join us. I am leaving Baba Faja and our defence platoon to protect you.'

His smile was full of persuasion, but I did not like the thought of being parted from the Council, without warning. I could give no reason, but I was just thoroughly uneasy, I had a foreboding that if we parted now it would be for the last time.

'I don't like it, Enver,' I said. 'We have been together through all this trouble and I am sure we should stick together. I think we should give up the defence platoon. If we made a joint group of ten we could make our way south safely. Your Council is too big and several members are too old to endure hard conditions. They could come on with our rear party later. Once the Germans know we have escaped south they will stop pressing Chermenika and the situation will ease off for the partisans and Mission remaining. Will you not agree to this?'

Enver thanked me for my suggestion, but said his plans were made and could not be altered. He looked forward to seeing me again in a few days.

As he stood up to go I said, 'We have been in this area too long. If we must split I would like to move somewhere else until you call us forward.'

'No, my General, stay here, it is quite safe. Baba Faja knows this country backwards. If he thinks fit he will move you. It is terrible weather, you will be more comfortable here and the weather will protect you.' I argued that the blizzard was ideal for moving—no one would know where we had gone.

Seeing that he was determined to go, I wished him success in his arrangements for breaking out. 'Try to send back some medical aid for Colonel Nicholls' feet, they are septic and we have nothing with which to dress them. He is unfit to march as he is.'

'Yes,' Enver said, 'I will get some from Tirana. Goodbye, my General, see you soon.'

That was the last I saw of him. I asked Palmer, who saw a lot of Enver after the war ended, if he believed the report that Enver had heard an attack was coming and left me to draw it, while the Council slipped away. Palmer was quite definite that there was no knowledge of the future disaster and that Enver was genuinely upset at the turn that events took.

Baba Faja stayed talking after the Council had gone, and told me he had now got a good house for us, the weather was getting worse, and we would all be more comfortable if we moved. We hoped so. The night passed peacefully, and the weather, instead of deteriorating, improved. The following morning our shopping party came back from the village with food—bread, onions, beans, two goats and a calf. Also a flagon of raki. The mulemen set to work to skin the goats and the calf, and roasted them in an outshed. Cookerettes were prepared as well. We looked forward to a

substantial meal at last. While it was cooking the commissar appeared with the Italian, Colonel Barbacinto, saying that the Council had left him behind to be fed by us. He was lucky to arrive at such an opportune moment, cookerettes cooking. Luncheon was ready about one o'clock, and very good it was; we ate heavily and intended to sleep it off in the afternoon. The arrival of an agitated partisan at that moment put all thoughts of sleep out of our heads. He reported that the Boche were in the village of Kostenje, 1,000 feet below us. If it were true, they would take an hour at least to reach us. I ordered everyone to be ready to move but to stay put. Meat was to be cooked for cutting up.

The news was sent to Baba Faja by runner, and he was asked for confirmation. About half-past two his commissar came to see me. I spoke to him on the path outside our hut. The visibility was clear, and the weather was better. I asked what confirmation he had got of the rumour of Kostenje being occupied by Boche. He replied, 'It is impossible, my General, we have spies in every village, every track is watched, we are bound to get at least two hours' warning. I have heard nothing.'

As he said the last words a burst of machine-gun fire went between us, Crack, crack, crack, crack. I waited for the thump, thump, thump, thump, and spotted where it had come from—a ridge of high ground above us to the west, about 600 yards away. A line of sections each about ten strong was hurrying along the ridge. I looked at them through my field glasses, they were Balli and Nationalists, each section led by one or two Germans.

Here was the answer to Enver's boast that he would wipe out the Ball Kombetar: in that left-flanking party there were about 200 men. There was a big gully between us, which must be deep in snowdrifts. It

would take them a good half-hour to close with us if we stayed here. Fire was now coming at long range from the ground around Kostenje, where there appeared to be about 1,000 men in two main groups climbing up to us from the south. They would take forty-five minutes to reach the sheep-folds.

I gave the order to march, quick. If we could climb the ridge to the north-east we would come to the forest of pines, and once under cover of them we should be able to shake off pursuit and make our way by night march to the Martanesh area.

We were mostly in single file, ploughing through deep snow as we climbed slowly up the ridge. I was about halfway down the column, Nicholls in front of me leaning heavily on a tall mountaineer's stock, Chesshire behind me. We must have been a perfect target against the background of snow, with the sun shining full on us. We were making slow progress. The few partisans and mulemen who were with us turned occasionally towards the enemy and fired bursts from Sten guns and Birettas in the hope of discouraging our pursuers. It was no use trying to make a stand until we reached the high ground on the edge of the forest; all we could do was keep climbing steadily. Long-range rifle fire, coming from west and south, was accurate and plugging into the snow on both sides of us. It was a marvel that no one was hit.

We were getting within reach of the forest and I was thinking we would soon be safe, when a burst of Spandau fire came from our right front. I felt as though a horse had kicked me hard in the ribs. I spun round and fell into a snowdrift in a gully on my right. Behind me, Chesshire had been hit through the thigh, the Italian, Colonel Barbacinto, through the neck, and an Albanian partisan through both thighs. They too fell into the gully. We were all struggling to avoid

being smothered in the drift, the snow stained scarlet in patches from our blood. Above us, the column had halted, bewildered at the tragedy. We had often talked over what we should do if something like this were to happen, when we had no doctor, nor stretcher bearers to put on dressings. It would be impossible to carry a stretcher on a slope like that in deep snow. The unpleasant decision I had taken was that badly wounded men must be left to their fate; sound men must not go to their help. It would only mean that they too would be hit or captured.

Bullets were still cracking round continuously, and at any moment someone else would be hit. I shouted to Nicholls, 'Go on, I'm hit—you take charge.' He looked down at us in horror; the one thing he had not wanted to happen had happened. He was ill, weak, and in no state to march, still less to take on the responsibility of the Mission at a time of disaster like this. He just said, 'Very good, sir, goodbye,' and went on climbing painfully. I then saw Hare stopping. I shouted to him to go on, that I had been hit twice in the stomach and the heel. He was very reluctant to leave Chesshire and me. Next moment Sgt. Smith was down in the gully—he had come to help us. I gave him a direct order to go on with the others. He refused. 'Smith,' I said, 'you know what the orders are. Wounded men are to be left. Go and join the others at once. I order you to go.'

Smith smiled slowly in his Yorkshire way. 'Brig., you're in no position to give me orders. I'm your bodyguard and I'm stopping with you. You'll need me before you have finished.'

When I saw he intended to stay with us, and the others were now some distance away, I said to him, 'Try to find somewhere to get us under shelter. We will die of shock if we remain exposed to this cold for very long.'

'There isn't much shelter about here, Brig., but I'll try to find some.'

He went away for a while, and came back. 'There is a sheep-fold down the gully. If I can get you to that you'll be all right.'

Just then, Roberto, the Italian interpreter, and his sergeant-major arrived. Smith sat beneath us, and by scooping out snow with his hands and shuffling his bottom he started a small avalanche, so that all the wounded tobogganed down the gully, until we landed in a pile of snow. Smith and the Italians dug us out, and one by one they got us up the rise to the sheep-fold. It was a small stone hut, with a door, but no windows, and a roof of sorts. I was dragged into the hut and laid down in the far corner. By now I was in extreme pain, with cramp in the stomach and knees tucked up. Chesshire was brought in next to me, his thigh was bleeding badly and was very painful. Smith bandaged it with our first field dressings. There was little he could do for me. The wound in front was small. He stuck some plaster over the entrance.

Col. Barbacinto was hit through the base of the neck, he was delirious and making an awful fuss. I roared at him to pull himself together and shut up that bloody noise. He continued to moan and roll his eyes.

The Albanian partisan was hit through both thighs, nasty wounds; he was quiet and made no fuss, and stuck the pain with great fortitude.

Sgt. Smith pulled wood out of the roof and lighted a fire. The battle died away up the mountainside. I hoped to God the others had escaped. How far Nicholls would get with those septic feet I did not know. There was not much daylight left, so with any luck they should escape in the wood.

At that point, a bullet cracked into the stone wall of the hut, then another and another. Fire was

opened on us from all sides. Listening to it as we lay on the floor, it sounded like a company attack from the south, supported by a fire company from the west, about eighty men in each party. Spandaus, with their quick rate of fire, and the more normal Brens, played tunes to each other. The range at first was roughly four hundred yards. The enemy evidently thought we had intended this hut on the knoll to be a strongpoint. They may even have fired past each other from opposite sides of the hut and thought we were firing at them; there must have been some reason for this expenditure of ammunition. Sgt. Smith went outside and walked round the hut, shouting, '*Inglisi feriti*,' which Roberto had told him meant 'English wounded here.' They took no notice of him—in any case they could not have heard him in the row of the firing. Smith led a charmed life, bullets were cracking all round him and spurting up the snow. I could see him standing outside the door, with his hands in his pockets, quite unperturbed. I was worried that he would be hit. Chesshire called to him to come in. Smith was slow to respond, had a good look all round.

'They're massing for the kill, Brig. The chaps on this side are making their way towards us quickly, while the others are covering them. It will be all over soon,' he said.

The firing died down, only the odd bullet hitting the wall with a smack, the calm before the storm. Then hell was let loose. The supporting party opened rapid fire with all their weapons, the attacking party threw grenades and charged, shrieking at the tops of their voices, we saw them as they came to the crest of the knoll—baggy trousers, crossed bandoliers, beards. Smith jumped to the door and fired rapidly all six rounds from his '38 revolver, then he threw the revolver at them in a fine gesture of defiance. The next second they were on to him. With his back to the door he

struck at them with his fists, then ducked through the door, ran across the hut and stood astride my body. In a second the fold was crowded with Albanians, with rifles pointed, fingers on the triggers, everyone milling round, pushing, shouting, jostling. A big man with a beard pushed his rifle into my ribs. Smith hit him. Another tried to take off my boots. We looked like being pulled to pieces by the mob. Then their leader, a younger man, forced his way in and ordered most of them out. Roberto explained to him who we were. He came to me and asked, 'How do I know that you are the British general?' I pointed to the lion and crown on my beret. He asked, 'Can I take it for a short while to make my report?' He grabbed it off my head and went out.

The fire had been scattered in the excitement. Smith and Roberto raked it up into a heap and put fresh wood on to it. Outside the Albs were talking excitedly, inside only two were guarding-us.

CHAPTER NINE

THE NIGHT passed slowly. I was ill and exhausted. Smith kept the fire going, but there was nothing else he could do for us. At dawn, the crowd came back with Capo, their leader, stretchers were made with poles from the roof and old blankets, forty men were detailed off as stretcher bearers. There was much talking and shouting with gesticulations before a move was made. I can only remember patches of the nightmare journey as I was only conscious part of the time. But it was a supreme effort on the part of the Albanians to get the four wounded men down that steep slope, in snow, with ice making treacherous every step they took. At places a human chain was formed on both sides of the path and the stretchers were passed down it. On several occasions the blankets, rotten from age, split and let the wounded man down into the snow. Mountain streams were crossed with the bearers waist deep in rushing water.

We were halted for the night at villages where crowds pressed into the room to see the prisoners, and stood to stare continuously. Food was brought for the others, but I did not dare to swallow anything. I could feel myself bleeding internally. I was also suffering from diarrhoea and had to be carried out by Smith to the primitive lavatory. Chesshire was the only one with any paper, having received a large fan mail in the last drop. One by one his precious letters were handed over on demand by Smith. 'Come on, sir, cough up another of her letters, the Brig. is off again.' Reluctantly they were sacrificed.

On the second day Chesshire was made to ride a

horse, the bearers would carry him no farther. It must have been agony for him with that wounded thigh. Smith helped to carry me and directed how I should be carried when it was his spell off. 'Don't be so bloody daft,' he kept saying in his Yorkshire voice at some stupidity.

The second and third nights were repetitions of the first, crowds staring, and everyone smoking rancid cigarettes which made me cough and aggravated the wound. On the fourth night we reached Lunik village and had scarcely been carried into a house before we heard the tramp of nailed boots coming up the narrow rocky street. An order was given in German and the patrol halted. A loud knock on the door and in came several soldiers dressed in army grey and wearing service peaked ski-caps. The officer spoke in good English.

'I am Oberleutnant Doktor Jebens. I have been sent to collect you and escort you to the Wehrmacht Hospital. Which of you is the general?'

Chesshire pointed me out and explained himself and Sgt. Smith.

'Herr General, where are you wounded?' the Doktor asked while he went on to examine me carefully, asking questions as he felt my back and ribs. His stretcher-bearers were left to put on dressings and take my temperature while he looked at Chesshire's thigh and plugged the wound.

'I am sorry that I have come without any morphia, but I was ordered out in a hurry and did not have time to check the satchel. All I can do until tomorrow morning is give you an opium pill to stop the diarrhoea. I hope to get you to Tirana where there is an experienced German surgeon, who will deal with your wounds. It is lucky that I can speak English. My brother's wife, Betty, is an English girl, now living in Neubadt-Glewa. My brother and I both know

England well, we used to spend our holidays there.'

He shifted the other two to another house. The wounded Albanian and Col. Barbacinto had been separated from us at the last village, Barbacinto quite off his head, blubbering and making a fuss, quite unlike the swaggering figure he had cut when we first met him.

The German soldiers were very interested in us, putting all sorts of questions about life in England in wartime, the state of food, results of air raids and submarine warfare. The Herr Doktor, as they ate a good supper, said to me. 'Do you know what they are saying to me? They say that German propaganda always paints Englishmen as horrors and brutal men, but here are three Englishmen who are quite normal. Is our propaganda wrong, or are these men exceptions? I have told them that I know England well and you are normal Englishmen.'

After they had finished their supper the Doktor called into the room the local Albanian Bajraktar, Aziz Bicaku, who controlled the Lunik area. I had heard about him from Frederick Nosi, who had served under him originally in the Ball Kombetar Party, and I had seen Bicaku the day before, at the last village, when he asked me, through Roberto, if Capo had been given any money by me. I told him no. Capo had taken my camera, my watch and my revolver, but what little money was left I still retained.

The Doktor now handed over a number of rifles and machine carbines to Bicaku, plus some money, and took a receipt from him. I asked the Doktor what he was doing, and he replied, 'We support the Balli with arms and money to fight the Communists you have been supporting.'

The following morning the German patrol took us down to the road where an ambulance was waiting

for us. Aziz Bicaku was there with a crowd of Balli to see us off. He stood laughing with the Germans beside my stretcher before I was lifted up into the ambulance.

Four years later, in Greece, I learnt that he was held by the Greeks in an aliens camp in Athens, but as the Greeks were by then struggling in civil war against their own Communists, I doubted whether Aziz Bicaku would pay the penalty for breaking up the Allied Mission in his country. I now know he was allowed to go to Istanbul.

We were shut up in the ambulance, Chesshire on one stretcher, I on the other, and Smith sitting beside me. The roads were in a shocking condition and had received little maintenance since the Italians had repaired them on taking over the country. We bumped and bumped from one pothole to another. The German *ersatz* tyres were hard to ride on and the springs of the ambulance gave little comfort. The Doktor rode in front with the driver.

We paused at a road garrison for him to get some morphia. The door opened and a crowd of German soldiers stared at us, they were not very high-grade troops, as one might expect on lines of communication. A typical Fritz, with short hair and thick spectacle lenses, addressed Smith, who sat there scowling, hating the imprisonment. 'How-long-haff-you-peen-in-Albannia?' It was slowly and deliberately said, emphasis on each word, and ending on a note of what-a-clever-boy-am-I. Smith blew himself up and shouted back, 'Thaasands and thaasands of fugging years!' He scowled at them all, Fritz recoiling at the fury in his face. Someone slammed the door.

Presently the Herr Doktor returned with some morphia, and gave me an injection. I slept till they woke me at El Basan, where the others were having German *ersatz* coffee. I washed my mouth out with it

but would not swallow. On the road, later, we stopped again and I was lifted out on my stretcher for a rest. Smith was taken on one side by the Doktor. 'Now is your chance, escape,' said Herr Jebens. Smith looked at him, dourly, and suspected he would be shot in the back the moment he made a move.

'No, my duty is to see my wounded officers safely into hospital,' he said.

'I will see to that. It is also my duty as a doctor,' Herr Jebens said.

'I would not trust any German, I will see them into hospital myself,' said Smith.

'Very well,' said Jebens. 'I understand your feelings as regards your duty, but you are throwing away your last chance of escaping. You won't get another.'

'I'll chance that,' said Smith.

I did not know about this until the ambulance was moving again. Smith was apprehensive that it was a German trick to have the excuse to shoot Chesshire and me. In fact, I think now that he could have escaped safely, and had I known I would have told him to make the attempt. Jebens seemed a good chap and may have meant what he said. He was very impressed with Smith's sacrifice of freedom to see his officers safe.

We reached Tirana Hospital that night. The ambulance backed into the courtyard of an Italian nunnery, now turned into a hospital, and we were carried upstairs. Jebens handed me over to the surgeon, Hauptmann Doktor Fritz Heck, who was surgical professor of the Universität Klinik, Würzburg, Bavaria. Heck was a big man, solemn-looking, with spectacles. He examined me, prodded my tummy, which was now distended and hard. He spoke a little English, I understood a little German, and so we managed to understand each other.

'Herr General,' he said, 'when were you wounded?'

'Six days ago,' I replied. He pulled a face and shook his head.

'If I had received you four days ago I could have saved you. Now peritonitis has spread nearly all over your abdomen. I will operate at once, an operation of exploration, *verstehen Sie?*'

'Yes, I understand,' I replied, 'but can I have an hour's rest on a bed? I am very tired after the bumping in the ambulance. Also I am covered with lice and I do not want to foul your hospital.'

Two Italian nuns cleaned me down and took away my clothes for disinfecting. I was carried down a corridor to a small ward for two and fell asleep at once. After an hour I was awakened by two theatre orderlies. Chesshire was in the other bed. His wound had been dressed and he was comfortable and having his supper. 'You will be all right now, Brig.,' he said. 'Good luck.' I was taken off to the theatre.

The door was painted '*Sala d'operazione.*' Inside it was tropical heat. I was lifted on to the operating table and strapped down, head, chest, wrists and legs. The surgeon came in. He washed his hands at the sink and an orderly held his rubber gloves as he got into them.

'*Wie gehts, Herr General?*' '*Gut, danke,*' I replied.

He came over to me and gave me a local anæsthetic in the tummy. I was fully conscious when he started to operate. An orderly held a towel in front of my face so that I could not see the surgeon. I felt him make a long incision and then another. At some stage they rolled me on to my side to drain away the blood. I heard it splash on the floor and saw the surgeon taking his feet out of range of the drips. I passed out. I next remember being lifted off the operating table and carried back to my ward, but remember little more for a month.

Chesshire had been taken away to another ward

when I came to. I was being given a blood transfusion, the donor a blond Aryan. A swarthy Austrian gave the second blood. We lay side by side in opposite directions, a turntable affair between us regulating the flow. There was yet again a third transfusion. Saline injections followed, bottles hung above me, needles feeding into my arm.

Each night a nun in white sat by my bed on watch. The surgeon visited me often. A week after the operation they had evidently decided I would die that night as the nun had changed into black and placed a crucifix at my head. She asked if I was a Catholic. I hardly had the strength to shake my head. She took my hand and made the sign of the Cross over me. There was a flap in the night—she rushed out for the surgeon, who came in wearing a dressing gown and injected me. At dawn he came back again with another doctor. They both exclaimed, '*Wunderbar! Wunderbar!*' and were evidently delighted that I was still alive.

It was a slow recovery. Heck watched me like a hawk, and twice a day he prodded my tummy low down, looking for trouble; every fourth day he dressed the wound. It was a regular performance. First the rattle of the bottles on the tray down the corridor, then a knock on the door and in would enter the orderlies, in white, and post themselves one at each corner of the bed. Next would come the clerk with his board to take record of all that was done. The trolleys were arranged. Another knock at the door and the surgeon would enter, '*Guten Morgen, Herr General. Wie gehts?*' He would stride to the bed, his riding boots showing beneath his apron. He would lift down the bedding gently. Then he began dictating as he worked and the clerk took it all down. An orderly handed him forceps after the binder had been unpinned and removed. He forgot all about me. I

was just a case. He removed the dressings and flung them on the floor, where they remained stinking, sometimes for hours, until the ward was cleaned. He cleaned the wound himself, still dictating. His air of worry while he did all this was rather alarming to a patient—I always felt I must be much worse. After he had retired with his clerk it was the orderlies' turn. Four strong men lifted me gently and swabbed me down back and front with ether. It was a chilly performance, but saved me from bed sores all that long time in bed. The binder was again pinned in place, and could stay there for another four days. The orderlies withdrew. The ordeal was over.

I learnt from the surgeon how lucky I was to have survived at all. When his theatre staff had gone through my clothes before they were disinfected, they had found, in a pocket, an English sovereign, a George IV snuff box, and fragments of a smashed bottle of aspirin. From the holes in my clothes the bullet's path could be traced. It should have gone through my heart, but had first struck the sovereign, loose in the battledress pocket, had dented the coin and been deflected by it as it tilted. It then smashed the aspirin bottle, passed through the George IV snuff box in my inside pocket, went through my body and out at the back. What the Germans had not found and never did find was a silk escape map of Albania, which had been penetrated by the bullet and was bloodstained.

That the sovereign had been in my pocket at all was by a strange chance. Chesshire had been counting out a pile of gold some days before, and in the heap of sovereigns had noticed that one of them bore Victoria's head, was dated 1872, and carried on the reverse side the Royal coat of arms instead of the usual St. George and the dragon. He asked me the significance. I said, 'Let's have a look, Jim.' He tossed it over. During the first part of Queen Victoria's

reign, sovereigns, as well as five-shilling pieces, were intermittently produced, bearing the Royal arms on a shield. In the early 1870s St. George was permanently adopted for the reverse of the sovereign. This coin was probably one of the last to be minted with the arms and without the dragon. Of all the thousands we had counted, it was the first of its kind we had noticed. I popped it into my breast pocket, and said, 'Jim, when I am at the Savoy after the war, in tails, at a regimental dinner, that shall be on my watch-chain.' We laughed and forgot all about it.

The enemy machine-gunner had scored a pool bull. He had also ruined my snuff box, inscribed 'H. F. Yeatman, Ll.B., to I. Smith, Esq., as a mark of esteem, 1833.' It had been given to me just before I left England, for luck. It had helped me over many sticky conferences, filled with Princes' Special snuff. Albanians help themselves generously to everything, and snuff was their downfall. Beards and long whiskers suffered from violent sneezes. Shouts of laughter restored an awkward situation.

There was only one German nurse, a girl who told me she came from a family of nine children in Prussia, her father being a soldier, but she was transferred to another hospital at Kossova, and left me to the care of the Italian nuns.

Schwester Anna was my favourite. She worked in the theatre and was, therefore, interested in my case. She brought small delicacies to tempt my appetite—tender pieces of cauliflower fried in olive oil and dusted with breadcrumbs. '*Cauli, cauli,*' she would coax, '*mangiare, mangiare.*' It was difficult to refuse to eat but I had small desire for food. She would tell me scraps of war news, heard on her wireless. She used to mark up war maps in her room and bring them, concealed in her voluminous clothes, for me to see. She was out in the town at Tirana when the first

British fighter raid came in, the sister with her was killed when the town was attacked, but Anna took it well and explained how the fighters had rocketed the airfield and destroyed twelve aircraft, including 'Gert and Daisy' or, as the Germans called them, 'Max and Moritz.'

She had been theatre sister since the Italians had tried to conquer Greece alone, and she told me of the thousands of amputations that had been done, a whole barracks had been taken over for the frostbite cases. The Italian Army had been unready for the severe cold in the mountains and had suffered badly in consequence. My own hands and feet were affected by the frost, both fingers and toes having been bitten on the journey on the stretcher, so I could sympathise with the Italians. Schwester Anna had planned an escape for me later, when I should be better, showing me the key to a door which led to stairs giving access to the road. She had friends who would hide me—it was all arranged. 'When you are better,' she smiled. Unfortunately, getting better was a slow business. I hated to admit it, even to myself, but the left side of my tummy was growing tender, and rapidly became painful. I hoped the surgeon would not discover it, but those searching fingers, prodding for trouble, found the lump and made me flinch. 'So,' he said, nodding. 'An abscess. Operation, *Morgen früh.*' I funk'd being chopped again—it was a month since the first.

In the evening he looked at me again, marked the spot with an indelible pencil, deciding it was developing too quickly, and made a statement to me in German, English, French and Italian. 'I mak' operation vite. It is nichts periculous, but necessaire.' In five minutes the orderlies appeared and I was carried down the passage once again. This time I was conscious all the time while he removed an abscess

the size of a polo ball, or so Schwester Anna illustrated it with cupped hands. Once rid of it, I began to improve. For the first time since I was wounded my temperature fell to normal and I began to want to eat. '*Wunderbar!*' said Heck. '*Wunderbar!*' echoed his assistant. There was one more wound to be drained and dressed.

I was interested to hear the surgeon doing his rounds. All down the passage came shouts and groans as he dressed the German troops. In the next room, an officer, hurt in a tank, made a great fuss. Was the German soldier braver in the field than he was in hospital, or was German surgery and treatment unnecessarily brutal?

Cheshire's leg had made a quick recovery, the bone was not touched, and the muscles responded to rest and treatment. He was moved from Tirana without my knowledge. Sgt. Smith, too, had left. While I was still very ill, Dr. Jebens brought him to my ward and allowed him to speak to me from the door. I was too weak to reply, and from the worried expression on his face I could tell that I was not looking my best. I felt very guilty that he had been taken prisoner on my account. When he left, my last link with my Mission had gone.

Both of them had been taken away in two Gestapo cars at dawn with outriders on motor-cycles, so great was the fear of S.O.E. members escaping. As an additional precaution some dope had been mixed with Cheshire's food, giving him agonies of diarrhoea while he travelled, and making him too weak to get far if he did succeed in escaping. They reached the jail in Belgrade by train and were imprisoned in underground cells. They learned from a Yugoslav that the cell Cheshire now occupied had previously held a Major Selby, who had been shot in the back of the neck in the corridor outside. Cheshire's feelings

can be imagined. Here Smith and he remained for six weeks until moved on, Cheshire to an Oflag, Smith to an R.A.F. camp.

I realised that special precautions were being taken with me, not that I was in any position to escape, but an attempt might have been made to raid the hospital to get me out, either by the partisans or the British Mission. Outside my door sat a corporal and a sentry, day and night, and outside the window a machine-gun team. But no hostility was shown to me by any one of the guards or the hospital staff. Soon after the first operation, when they had thought I was going to die, an intelligence interrogation team of three tried to cross-examine me. I can only remember an Oberst Lange, wearing an Iron Cross, who said he had been doing the same job against the Russians in the Caucasus, 'with considerably more success than you, Herr General.' But I am very vague about it—I was only half conscious.

About this time, too, the German Consul from Tirana visited me, wearing a Harris tweed cloak. We stared at each other in mutual recognition. 'Ach! So. You recognise me. The report of your capture gave your name, and I thought it might be the same officer. The tables are turned completely, *nicht wahr?*'

Of all the bad luck, I thought. We had met before, in the summer of 1938, in Palestine. It was the time of the Arab troubles and a broad wire fence had been erected by Jewish contractors for the Government. It ran from the Jordan Valley to the Mediterranean, and was intended to make a barrier to stop large-scale raids by parties of Arabs using Syria as a base. Our 2nd Battalion, commanded by Lieutenant-Colonel Gerald Whitfeld, was stationed guarding the fence and had two columns on duty at Iqrit and Al Mali-quiya. At the time I was commanding the column at

Al Maliquiya and was much concerned at the interference with the anti-personnel mines in the fence, which were being taken out and used against us. We did not think the Arabs were capable of finding and removing them, with the booby traps laid alongside to prevent their removal. Accordingly, I arranged a surprise check of everybody found on the frontier road at 2 p.m. on a given day. The persons found were to be taken to my camp and put in a cage, where they could be checked over at leisure by the civil police. On the appointed day I was driving along the frontier road with a patrol when we rounded a corner and saw several men in European clothes up by the fence. We got out and surrounded them. They pretended to have been urinating and claimed they belonged to the German Embassy in Jerusalem. I was conveniently dense and said, 'Nonsense, they are Syrians interfering with the fence, put them into the cage,' and they were taken off by the patrol.

The Germans were supporting the Arab rising with arms, ammunition and explosives, and were reported to have a mission advising the bands on sabotage and tactics, so we were not well disposed towards the Axis in Palestine. Into the cage they went with the Arabs found on or near the road, and spent a hot afternoon in the full sun, being laughed at by the riflemen.

The First Secretary from the German Legation in Jerusalem arrived in a Mercedes car, flying the Nazi swastika. I kept him waiting before seeing him. He then demanded instant release of his men and made threats to me as to what he would do. I grabbed him by the coat collar and said, 'If I have any more buck from you, into the cage you go too. Get out of this camp, quick.' The police took away the German and Arab suspects.

Now I was faced with the same German First Secretary, saying, 'You threatened to put me in the cage? Now it is you who are in the cage.' How much he was responsible for my subsequent treatment is not hard to guess.

The German newspaper, *Völkische Beobachter*, of February 18th, 1944, reported: '*Zur Aufwiegelung der albanischen Bevölkerung hatten die Engländer den General Davies mit einer Anzahl weiterer Agenten nach Albanien geschickt. Es gelang ihm in der Nähe von Tirana aufzuspueren und gefangen zunehmen.*' ('To stir up the Albanian population the English sent General Davies with a number of other agents to Albania. We succeeded in discovering him in the neighbourhood of Tirana and have captured him.')

A *Sonder Fuehrer* came to see me a lot, a cadet officer, who spoke good English and had lived in Dulwich for some years. He talked on all sorts of subjects not connected with the war, but never tried to pump me. He brought a big Bulgarian officer, who was wearing a grey greatcoat lined with red, to see me one day. I think the *Sonder Fuehrer* came from the propaganda company of the division, and his job was to impress the Bulgarian with my capture. Quite recently the Bulgarian made an attempt to get in touch with me from Germany, with what motive I do not know.

The German orderlies were good-hearted soldiers; they would occasionally slip a bottle of light beer to me to cheer me up, hiding it in the jerry cupboard until they should be able to remove the empties. They were in a state of apprehension at the heavy bombing raids, from Americans by day and British by night, on their home towns. Their wives wrote that the *Flieger* alarm was sounding continuously. Then they would get news that their town had been raided and would be thoroughly upset until they had news that

the family was safe. One of the *sanität* corporals told me that an aircraft factory making Messerschmidts was just outside his town; it was bound to get bombed soon. A week later it caught the full force of a night raid and he was most upset and came to me for reassurance. I told him that all the bombs would go down on the factory and he need not worry about his family, but I was not so certain. In a few days he came smiling to me and said the Messerschmidt factory was '*kaput*,' but the town was safe, not a bomb on it. I told him that raids by Germans on England were a very different story and gave him details of my own experience in raids in London, Plymouth, Belfast, Exeter and Eastbourne. In a quiet way it was possible to do a lot of propaganda to upset their morale, both through Schwester Anna and the orderlies. Even Heck, the surgeon, would talk when he was alone with me during the night. He had no illusions which way the war would go and was concerned in case their hospital would not be able to get north before they were cut off. He told me about his wife, their garden, the books they read. I asked if he could get a letter back to England for me, to let my wife know that I was all right. He brought me paper, and with difficulty I wrote a short note. It reached England safely some months afterwards, the first news of me since the broadcast which said I had been captured, badly wounded.

I have never heard whether Heck survived the war. No one could have been kinder to me than he was, in the circumstances. His skill undoubtedly saved my life. He was hard-worked, the only surgeon in the hospital, with 150 beds, all surgical cases. After a long day's work he was often pulled out at night to operate on wounded. There were about fifty Albanians, Balli and Zogists, as patients in the hospital, but no Partisans. That gave proof who was collaborating

and who was not. I had been lucky to strike first Jebens and then Heck. Both did their best for me. Chesshire was well treated too, as his leg is quite sound now. There was much clicking of heels, Nazi salutes and 'Heil Hitlers' when a senior officer was about, but underneath the outward show there was nothing Nazi about those two doctors. The hospital staff were happy and contented too, from the orderly, who came around in the evening with the yellow aperient pills, shouting '*It-stit-zine*,' to the huge masseur, who had coached the German Olympic swimming team. He was put on to try to get some life back into the wasted muscles of my legs and arms, and he told me of his Olympic triumphs.

In the hospital I learnt patience, lying for weeks on my back, with nothing to read and nobody to talk to for hours. I found difficulty in sleeping. The food was rough—noodles, *Wurst* sausage, cooked meat—the same as German soldiers' rations. Heck tried to help me with eggs, sweetbreads, brains, but he was too busy to cope with diet as well. He gave me one glass of white wine a day, from the troops' canteen, to improve my *Blut*. I had been lying there for two and a half months when he asked me if I would like to stay where I was or would prefer to go farther north, to Belgrade. They were beginning to evacuate their seriously wounded cases, which pointed to the first stages of quitting the country.

I did not suppose that he was really asking me what I wanted to do, but was breaking gently to me the fact that I was about to move on. This would ruin any chance of escaping later, as planned by Schwester Anna, but in any case I would not be fit enough to make an attempt for many months, even if it was easy to do so.

Another few days passed. Hans Raubener, a Bavarian ward orderly, brought me my bottle of

beer from the canteen and made some poached eggs for me in the kitchen—*Ochsenaugen*, he called them. I never look at an ox's eyes now without thinking of him. We had our usual evening chatter, when I taught him some English and learnt some German in return. He tidied up the ward and departed. At three in the morning I was wakened by a *Feldwebel*, who had entered the ward with three stretcher-bearers. They wrapped me up in blankets, put me on the stretcher and tucked my battledress under my feet. I was carried down to the yard and put into an ambulance. It was a cold morning, with a fresh breeze blowing, as we drove off to the airfield, on concrete roads full of potholes. Every bump shattered me and I held on to my stomach with both hands and arms. The drainage tubes were still in and were most uncomfortable travelling. We pulled up beside a *sanität* plane, a three-engined Junkers ambulance, and they loaded me in with eleven other patients, all German soldiers. Hans Raubener had found his way to the airfield to say goodbye. He said he had only just heard I was going and could not let me go without saying *Auf Wiedersehen*. He waited a whole hour, until we taxied off, and stood there saluting when I saw the last of him.

The aircraft took off at dawn from the grass. The pilot had been most painstaking in warming up his engines, first port, then starboard, then the one in the nose. The wings and sides of the fuselage were marked with large red crosses. In addition to the patients, the plane carried about a dozen staff officers, who sat in a cabin behind the pilot, each of them carrying a fat brief-case. Behind the stretcher cabin a rear-gunner had a turret with twin guns, his spare boxes of ammunition lying on the floor between our stretchers. The Germans evidently left nothing to chance. An army doctor was in charge, but paid no attention to us at

all, sitting manicuring his nails and combing his hair like a woman.

We took off easily, climbing steadily to the northwest. I could not see much of Tirana from where I was lying, but looked up at Chermenika, above Shengerj, to the mountain tops round Biza where we had landed with such high hopes. Had Nicholls and Hare survived after the attack on our Headquarters? The Germans had shown me photos of dead bodies in British battledress who they said were Kemp, Riddle and Simcox, but I could not recognise any of them. I would have to wait till after the war before hearing the rest of the story.

We had turned right-handed and were passing over the Abas Kupa country now. He had made no use of the four plane-loads of arms I had given him in November, although he had promised to attack the Germans as soon as we gave him arms. The sorties were arranged to try him out and take him at his word. He had said that if we gave him money he knew where to put his hand on ten thousand rifles, but we had not believed him—large quantities of arms do not remain unused in the Balkans. He was a genial old fox, but, in my opinion, he had no intention of fighting and weakening his side, and intended to sit on the fence until he was forced off it by events, hoping the partisans would weaken themselves against the Germans to a point where he could defeat them. He would produce every excuse to avoid a fight. I had no faith in the Zogists nor the Balli attacking the Germans. There was no danger of the partisans collaborating with the Boche, and they would fight when it suited them to fight, though not nearly as often as they should have done. It was quite disgraceful that the roads should have remained open to the Germans all over this perfect guerrilla country, when it would have been so easy to close them. From Lunik

I had been taken in an ambulance to Tirana, the last two hours in darkness, without any interference on the road, and traffic running freely in both directions. I sighed to think what we could have achieved had the genuine will been there to fight to free Albania. There were too many political groups, too many people ready to let others do the fighting—everyone looking to the postwar political position. What they never seemed to realise was that if they failed to get experience in fighting now they would be beaten by more experienced forces later. The partisans were bound to come out on top.

My last view of Albania's roads showed German convoys proceeding unmolested. The mountains were covered with snow which looked feet deep so unbroken was the surface. From a gauge in the cabin we were flying at nine thousand feet, about a thousand feet above the crests, and could see the wind whipping the snow off the mountain tops. We were flying slowly, at about one hundred miles an hour, and the Junkers rolled steadily but without bumping, and our shadow was clear in the snow. At intervals the gunner came down from his turret to warm himself, and walked up and down the cabin, slapping his arms like a caddy and breathing on his hands.

It took a long time to cross the mountains, but at last we descended into a river valley, with fields flooded on both sides, isolated farm houses, and herds of black pigs running about in the mud. The pilot flew very low for the last part of the flight, and stayed down until we reached Belgrade itself, when he circled four times before he was called in to land on the large airfield that had been built between the Sava and the Drava rivers. We taxied up to the airport buildings, and there was transport for everyone except me, and I was left in the plane. One hour passed, and another. I watched the continuous stream

of planes coming in and taking off, all transports or fighters—there seemed to be no bombers. I had ample time to compare *Wehrmacht* uniform with *Luftwaffe*, and occasionally small parties of S.D. and Gestapo. Their peaked hats, uniforms and black top boots were smart but oppressive, the grey with the black producing a grim effect. They all seemed to be well decorated and covered with medals, and the number of Iron Crosses of different classes was large. The *Luftwaffe* officers were decidedly poseurs. Nazi salutes and 'Heil Hitlers' were prominent when the Gestapo were around, and there seemed to be no love lost between the *Wehrmacht* and the Gestapo boys. The only women I saw in uniform were nurses or ambulance drivers.

The ambulance that came for me was small and driven by a fat civilian. He hoisted me up to the roof and slammed the doors, leaving me in darkness, unable to see out. Again it was an uncomfortable ride, the roads as bad as the Albanian roads and slippery with snow. We went down a steep bank on to a pontoon bridge, a very long one judging by the time it took to cross, before we were in street traffic, with cars all around us. The hospital was close to the bridge, a big building that had been used prewar for exhibitions, the reception orderly told me. Again my battledress and clothes were removed for the disinfectant and I was given heavily striped pyjamas in blue.

A newspaper reporter judged his moment and dashed up to me, hissing interrogatively, 'Magyar?' I replied, 'Nein.' He continued, 'Ja, Magyar, sprechen Sie Deutsch?' Again I said, 'Nein.' With that the orderly returned, saw the reporter, rushed over and kicked him on the shins, slapped his face and drove him out of the main door. I did not discover what the Magyars had been up to, but was carried upstairs to a big empty ward and put to bed. A guard

was mounted on the door. An excellent meal was brought to me and I was ready to attack it, as I had had no food since 6 p.m. the previous day. It was probably the exaggerated security rules that made food arrangements impossible when travelling but it seemed unnecessary to drag a patient from bed at three in the morning, drive him to an airfield, fly him three hours, leave him waiting, and not get him back to bed for another four, all this time without food. I had still to learn a thing or two.

After I had fed, a surgeon inspected me. He was very good-looking, smartly turned out, and was wearing a silk apron over breeches and boots. He asked when my wounds had last been dressed. I told him twenty-four hours past, but he could not believe that they could have got into such a state in so short a time. What surgeon had been attending me? I told him that no one could have been better to me than Herr Hauptmann Heck, but that since leaving him I had been jolted about for seven hours, in two ambulances and in a plane, and that evidently accounted for the damage. He was gentle and skilled. Helping him was a lady surgeon, young, attractive, vivacious. My morale began to go up. Interpreting for us was an American woman, who would not tell me who she was or what she was doing there at that stage of the war.

It was an easy-going hospital—any German trooper could come in and talk to me, one boy bringing me four novels, as he had studied English and found it good practice to read them. I had had nothing to read since being taken prisoner, and waded into the books. His father was a game warden on an estate in Saxony, and he said with pride, 'I am ein honter. I hont the hare and the antelope.' He emphasised every word, and took up an attitude as he 'honted' each animal. It was delightful, but difficult not to laugh at him.

There was a big staff of nurses on duty, day and night, and they made no difference between their own patients and me. For the second time I was the only English patient in a Boche hospital.

Five days had passed very contentedly, my appetite was improving with the good food. The surgeon had changed the treatment of my wounds; I was sleeping soundly. Outside snow was falling heavily and lying thick. It was about five o'clock in the evening when heavy footsteps sounded in the corridor. The doors of my ward were flung open and in marched five Gestapo thugs. The officer said one word to me, '*R'aus!*' Two of the men picked me up and dumped me on a stretcher held by the other two, and out we marched to another ambulance. Not another word was said and no sign of the hospital staff could be seen—they kept well out of the way. It was a *Wehrmacht* hospital and the Gestapo Political Police had walked into it and removed a patient without protest from the staff. The confidence given to me in the two hospitals evaporated.

CHAPTER TEN

I WAS dumped on to the floor of a small van, two Gestapo rode with me, two with the driver, a civilian. We drove fast through traffic and pulled up at a block of flats. My stretcher was quickly lifted out and carried inside, while two guards with sub-machine-guns watched passers-by. The stretcher was carried up six flights of rather steep stairs into the passage of a big flat. All doors were shut and we passed no one after entering the street door, as they carried me up the stairs and along the passage into a small room at the end of it. Two beds just fitted into the room, with a table and chair in the middle. Overhead there was a very bright light, unshaded. One bed was occupied by a neurotic-looking German. A sentry, armed and wearing his steel helmet, sat at the table.

I was lifted off the stretcher and put into the empty bed by a *sanität* corporal, who asked me, in German, what was wrong with me. He said he would call the doctor. Doktor Jung, a big, brutal-looking man, was also Gestapo and spoke fair English. He informed me, at once, that he had been made a prisoner by the English in East Africa in 1914 and that he had been badly treated before being repatriated. He examined my wounds, which were healing well now, but caught hold of the drainage tubes and roughly moved them up and down. The pain was excruciating. Soon after he had gone out the corporal came to tell Herr Schultz, in the other bed, that his protocol would arrive in a few minutes. I was not sure what his protocol meant, but I gathered subsequently that it was the stating of the case against him by the

investigating officers. Herr Schultz immediately became hysterical, tears coursed down his face, he demanded the doctor, injections, sedatives and electric shock treatment. The sentry shouted at him to shut up, without effect. Steps were heard coming down the passage, when Herr Schultz went silent and stared at the door in horror and fear. Two Gestapo officers entered, carrying brief-cases. The sentry jumped up to attention, and a spate of Heil Hitlering, right arms outstretched, went on. The officers sat at the table facing his bed and questioned Schultz, worrying him like a couple of terriers, first one, then the other, shouting at him and hitting him, till after three hours' interrogation he fell back frothing at the mouth, his eyes rolling. At that they gave it up, put their protocols back into their brief-cases and went down the passage.

This performance rather bewildered me. I did not know what to make of it, whether to take it as genuine and an example of Gestapo methods, or to regard it as a put-up job to scare and impress me. If the latter, it was a well-acted scene and Herr Schultz a first-class actor.

Next some food came, brought by the housekeeper matron, a fat, grim *Volksdeutsche* woman, who showed her hatred of me quite openly. I then asked for a bed-pan, but was told there were none—I must get up and use the lavatory. I said that was impossible, I had not been out of bed yet, the drainage tubes were still in and I was very weak. Without any more chat the corporal pulled back the bedclothes, picked me up in his arms and carried me into the lavatory, sat me on the seat and walked out. I could not support myself upright, my muscles were so weak, and I slumped over on to the partition and felt like fainting. Steps came down the passage and halted in front of the door. Another sentry was standing covering me

with his rifle, his finger on the trigger. I realised for the first time what ridiculous people the Germans can be, quite removed from any sense of reality.

Sleep during the night was not easy, what with the glare of the lamp, the changing of the sentries, the visiting rounds and the nightmare noises of Herr Schultz, who snored louder than anyone I have ever heard. At dawn the sentry wandered out into the passage to talk to another sentry. Like a flash, Herr Schultz beckoned to me, pulled some papers from inside his bed and flung them on to mine. I was at a loss what to do. If he was a plant, here was evidence that I was helping him against the Gestapo. If he was a genuine prisoner he was worth any help I could give him. I took a chance and tucked the papers beneath the blankets. Before the sentry returned Schultz told me that he had been arrested nine months ago for black-market offences, that he was a textile manufacturer and had made more than his quota of cloth to sell on the black market. All would have been well had a plane in which he was travelling not crashed. The Gestapo had searched the wreckage and found his brief-case, which contained papers giving away his secret trade. He was arrested in hospital with another of the passengers, and for eight months they had been working on him to discover the names of others in the black-market ring, but he had so far held out, giving nothing away. The whole story was in the papers he had thrown to me, together with his mother's address in Berlin. He feared he would never escape, and hoped that I could let his mother know what had happened to him.

To this day I do not know whether he was trying to implicate me or not. I got rid of his papers down the lavatory. He was left with me a few days, while the cross-questioning continued in full spate. Always in the middle the *sanität* corporal would bring a *Spritze*

injection, which calmed down Herr Schultz's hysterics, then the examination would continue until he was exhausted. On the fifth day the two officers came to take him away, and a further scene of hysteria and bullying took place, until he was dragged down the passage, clutching at doors as he went.

I was transferred into his bed. Two new officers came to examine me. They said they were Corps Intelligence officers from a local H.Q. As the one writing was wearing a white sweater with flannel trousers and the other a lounge suit they may have been anything. They never attempted any bullying but read out a long statement of places and people, asking me to confirm that the statement was true. I had never heard of the places nor the people, so I denied any knowledge of them, but they obviously did not believe me and kept asking the same questions about the same people, trying to trap me, but, as I genuinely did not know what they were talking about, it was easy not to make mistakes.

They returned next day for a repeat performance, but after that left me alone. I got friendly with my sentry during the night and discovered that an Englishman was in the room next door, a parachutist with broken legs and arms, a captain. There was also the companion to Herr Schultz, called Vidak, who was protocolled by Oberleutnant Müller of the Gestapo. I asked the sentry if he would take a note to the captain for me, but he refused. He did, however, borrow a German-English dictionary from him and from this I saw that it had been bought in Haifa, so it seemed certain that he was in S.O.E., as our training school was on Mount Carmel. The dictionary helped me to make a complaint about the bugs in the walls of the room, which penetrated into my bed. The *Volksdeutsche* woman hotly denied this until I showed three I had caught. I was then moved into a big

ward full of German patients while the small room was disinfested. Outside in the street propaganda vans were blaring while in the ward a patient obligingly switched his wireless to the B.B.C. news.

On April 16th, 1944, Orthodox Easter Sunday, when the usual large flight of American four-engined bombers passed high overhead from Italy on their way to Rumania, a much larger barrage of flak was thrown up at them, one plane was hit and brought down. There was great excitement amongst the sentries and the orderlies. They told me that the crew had baled out and come down in the river. I felt that Belgrade would regret that small triumph before long.

About midday the drone of a big formation could be heard and the sirens sounded. Looking out of the window from my bed I could see groups of four-engined bombers flying in formations of eleven at about twelve thousand feet, with fighters weaving about them, as they came straight towards us. The flak opened up and black puffs burst all round the groups. Then the bombs began to fall. All the Germans on our floor ran down the corridor to the stairs, including the sentries, S.D. men from Rumania. The bombs came nearer and nearer until they were falling all around us before they passed away. A second formation of bombers came in from a different direction, and then a third. More bombs fell around us, the windows splintered, the building swayed, dust blotted out the sun. It was a helpless feeling lying in bed on the top floor being bombed by one's own side.

The raid was over in twenty minutes. The sentries sneaked back looking very sheepish. They said four hundred bombers had taken part, in three groups, accompanied by fighter-bombers. *Terror-fliegers*, they called the American pilots. I felt the Boche had asked for it and had got it, and had little

to complain of. The doctor, who claimed to be Himmler's son-in-law, came in to say that no war target had been hit, but thousands of innocent Yugoslavs had been killed, and the German hospital by the bridge had four direct hits, killing most of the patients. It was the same hospital I had been in ten days ago. It was sited beside a fair target, and again I felt they had no grouse, but they made propaganda of the fact that the raid had come on the Orthodox Easter Sunday.

Clouds of black smoke blotted out the sun for the rest of the day and the sentries said the Gestapo record office was on fire. Houses on either side of us had been hit and a big house across the road demolished. The raid had given the Germans a bad fright and caused a lot of consternation. I asked if, in future raids, I could be taken to a shelter, as all the Gestapo were going to run away. The *Volksdeutsche* matron was in a fury of indignation and cursed the Americans, the British, the airmen and the soldiers for cowards who would not fight like men but who could only murder women and children. I told her that the number of women and children who had been murdered in England was ten thousand times more than in Yugoslavia, and they had been killed by her race, the Germans.

Next morning the sirens sounded again. Two sentries came to my room at once with a stretcher and carried me down the passage. At the head of the stairs was the Englishman from the next room, standing on crutches, refusing to go down the stairs and demanding a stretcher. I saw a German give him a shove towards the stairs, and saw him threaten the German with his crutch. I was carried past him down the stairs to the cellar, which was crowded with civilians and Gestapo. They put me into a smaller coal cellar and the sentry blocked the entrance.

Presently the drone of aircraft could be heard and the guns opened up. The bombs began to fall, came nearer and passed.

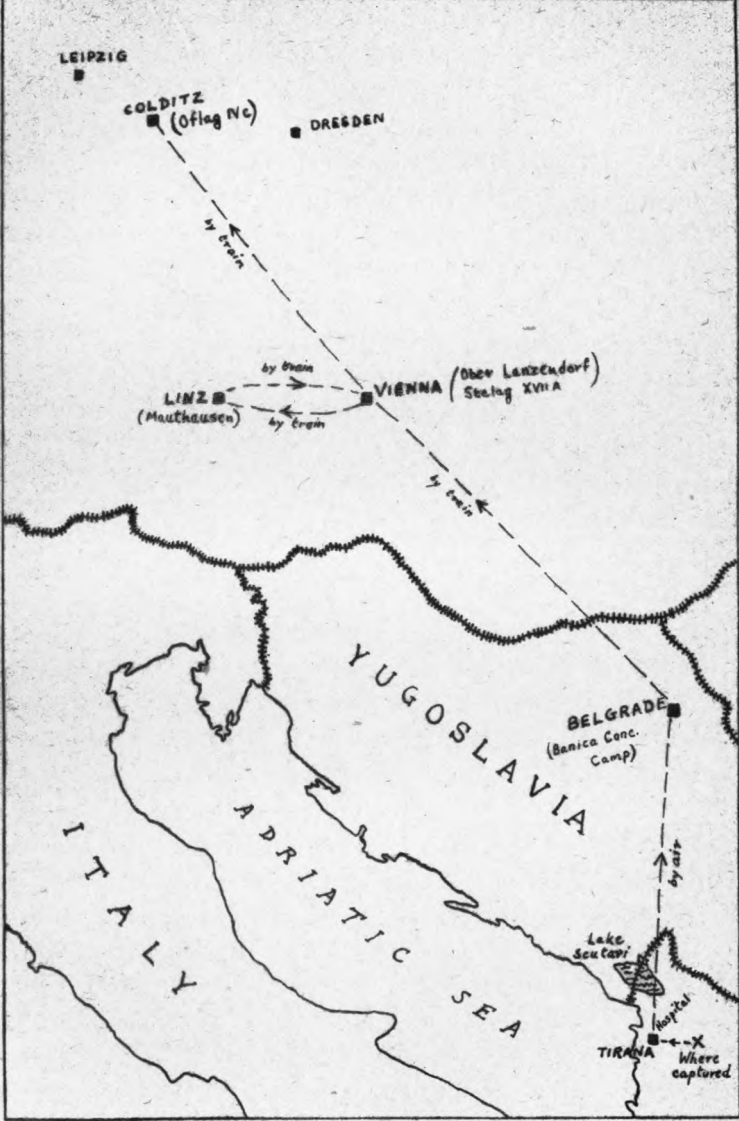
'*Vorbei*,' said the German. 'They're gone.'

The second wave came in at right-angles, the bombs came and passed, the building shook and blast swept dust and paper into the cellar.

'*Vorbei*,' said the Doktor and the sentry together. 'They're gone.'

The third wave came in from a fresh direction, and the bombs came closer this time, until one seemed to hit the building above us. There was a lot of shouting, but I could see nothing in the dust and darkness. It was unpleasant being tied to a stretcher down there. The raiders passed. Quickly I was carried into the street, but saw little except shattered glass, rubble, overhead wires from tramcars festooning the trees. A van was opened. My stretcher was pushed in beside the Englishman, his crutches beside him. The doors were closed by two S.S. men, who rode with us. We were told not to talk. The little van climbed over the debris in the streets, crossed a bridge, went some five kilometres into the country and stopped outside some big gates in a high stone wall. We drove into a courtyard and were carried into a large barrack building, which had been the n.c.o.s' school of the Yugoslav Army before the war. It was now the well-known Banica Concentration Camp.

Our stretchers were put down on the floor in the broad corridor of the third floor, the guards leaving us. The Englishman and I did some quick talking to identify each other before we were separated again. He told me that he also belonged to S.O.E. He had been dropped to Brig. Armstrong's Mission, with Mihailovitch, but had unfortunately fallen in a beech wood and was suspended in a tree by his parachute. In the dark he managed to swing by his harness until he



ROUTE TAKEN BY BRIGADIER DAVIES FROM HIS CAPTURE
IN ALBANIA TO HIS FINAL DESTINATION AT COLDITZ

straddled a branch, when he took off his harness. He climbed along the branch until he reached the trunk of the tree, then he started to slide down the trunk with his arms and legs around it. The beech trees in the Balkans, however, are much larger and taller than in England, and, as he descended, the branchless trunk grew so big that he lost his grip and fell a long way to the ground, landing on some roots of the tree and breaking his thigh and both arms. He lay there for twenty minutes until found by a search party from the Dropping Zone. A wireless operator had suffered a like fate. The Mission carried them about the mountains in a bullock-cart for five months; splints, bandages and drugs being dropped into them with instructions. A Yugoslav doctor had been brought into the mountains to care for him. His arms had set in a bent fashion, the thighbone was still disunited. At last, in a battle, he had to be left hidden in the snow of a ditch, in the hope that his own men would pick him up again after the fighting had died down, but the tracks in the snow had given him away, and some Russians, fighting with the Germans, had captured him. He had been taken to the Gestapo *Revier* in Belgrade. His name was Victor Vercoc. He had been in the tea trade in London before the war, had been a Territorial in the Middlesex Yeomanry and then been commissioned in the Royal Fusiliers.

All this time we had been chatting, a room was being made ready for us, and we were glad to find ourselves together. It had little in it except the two beds, which lacked mattresses, blankets and sheets, and had only some old threadbare string carpets covering the frames. A big, tiled, Balkan stove stood in one corner, unlighted. The large window gave a good view over Belgrade and the country to one



25. VICTOR VERCOE

sketched in Colditz



26. JIM CHESSHIRE



27. ESCAPE MAP, WITH SNUFF
BOX AND SOVEREIGN

side of it. Beneath our window was a concrete yard which held several wooden huts housing a crowd of other prisoners. A high stone wall shut in the compound. Until late at night we talked incessantly, giving each other every scrap of news, for fear of separation. How Vercoe had survived those months of agony in the mountains and after capture I could not think. He was bright, cheerful, uncomplaining, made light of his injuries, and was delighted to have someone to talk to. He was very useful too, as he learnt to speak Yugoslav while in the mountains and could talk with the orderlies who came to sweep the room and sit us upon the backyard dustbin which did duty as a commode in the corner of the room.

The Yugoslav doctor was himself a political prisoner, a Communist. He looked after the inmates of Banica to the best of his ability, but the poor man was given few medicines or means to help his patients. He came to our rescue with some aspirin when we both had foul headaches, largely caused by hunger. The bombing had upset distribution of food supplies and all we got daily was a small portion of a loaf of black bread and water. The doctor complained to the Camp Commandant, who came to see us and had us put on German rations like the troops. The doctor also took away the drainage tubes from my abdomen and somehow managed to heal up both scars. He was allowed to visit us unattended, and gave us what news of the outside world he had been able to pick up, sometimes allowing new arrivals to bring us fresh news while he kept guard in the passage.

Herr Schultz was upstairs, above us, and sent a message to me by the doctor demanding a reply, which I refused to give, still thinking he was a plant. Some days later I was told that he had flung himself

to the ground from a top-floor window and had killed himself. I am still not certain that he was genuine. Vercoe thinks that he was.

The Camp Commandant, Hauptmann Winter—the Gestapo did not use the term ‘Herr’ as the *Wehrmacht* did—soon talked freely to us in German when he was alone in our cell. He had been Hess’s head chauffeur and gave us an interesting account of his characteristics. Hess had been genuinely fond of the British, Winter said, and had always tried to influence Hitler to work with them instead of against them. He had always taken the view that war with Britain had been a mistake, and in flying to Scotland he had genuinely believed that he could bring the two countries together. Winter had not known that he was going to make the attempt, and first heard of it from his wife, one morning at breakfast, when she repeated a radio report. He was so utterly surprised he could not believe it. He knew that Hess had been taking medicines and sedatives for some time, but he would not say that he was out of his mind or did not know what he was doing. There was a fierce investigation, of course, as soon as the news of his flight became known, and everybody in any way connected with him was arrested on suspicion. He, Winter, was about the only one who could clear himself absolutely, as he had been away on leave and was able to show that he could not possibly have had any connection with it. He also told us that the main persons under suspicion were in Banica under arrest, under his command, as he knew them so well. He visited us most days, and always came to us during an air raid to tell us how many aircraft were coming in and what targets they were attacking. We had a front seat at all these raids and saw the flak guns, in their concrete positions not far from our prison, being attacked by fighters while the bombers went steadily in to drop

their bombs on the station and the big railway bridge across the river.

We saw two mountain divisions marching past with all their horse transport as they went south to attack the partisans.

The weather was very cold, with north winds sweeping across the plain bringing snow showers and frost at night. Into the yard below us were marched some four hundred Serbs, who had been working on an airfield after they had been captured from the partisans. They were not put into huts but were left out on the concrete clothed in rags and starving. Typhus had broken out amongst them. When dawn came, many of them were lying dead from exhaustion and the cold. The stronger men were crying up to the windows of our block for food. Foolishly, in pity, we threw down what remained of our loaf of black bread. It caused an uproar. Twelve men nearest to where it fell leapt to retrieve it, tearing, clawing, scratching each other as they fought to find it. The ear of one man was torn off as he staggered from the mêlée, while the others continued to fight like a pack of wild animals. It was ghastly to see human beings reduced to such a state, and almost impossible to believe that the Germans allowed it. The second morning many more were lying dead and were taken away in lorries. The remainder were marched away to a fate we could guess. For days after that the disinfecting plant beneath us was working at full pressure on the clothes of the prisoners who might have come into contact with them. We could hear the steam hissing continuously. We were told that seventeen thousand prisoners from Banica had been shot, in batches up to four hundred and fifty. They were buried in mass graves, which drained the ground so effectively and grew such excellent grass that a sports stadium had been built over them.

We were on the floor for women prisoners, women who came from countries occupied by Germany, whose brothers and fathers had gone up into the mountains to join the Resistance and whose women-folk paid the penalty of forced labour or imprisonment. In the morning and evening they were allowed out to the washroom for a short while from the big rooms where they were herded together. We could hear them chattering to each other as they scurried up and down the corridors. While our door was open one day a girl came quickly in, mistaking our room for the women's lavatory which was next door. She halted as she discovered her mistake, staring from one to the other of us, before the sentry shouted at her to come out. Three years after the war I was serving in Salonika and arranged for our cook's daughter to come to the flat in Niki Street to sew some chair covers, and I went into the room where she was working at a machine to see how she was getting on. The girl stared at me hard and then said, 'I have seen you before, in the war. The Gestapo arrested me because my brothers were with the partisans, and they took me to Belgrade, to Banica. You were in a room with another officer, both of you very thin and ill in bed. I can remember you distinctly.' It was a strange chance that sent Katina, the mother, to cook for us, and Anna, the daughter, to sew for us.

Hauptmann Winter came to tell us after a month that we were to be moved to Vienna by train. Downstairs we went to the disinfecting room, and I had my first shower since leaving Cairo, nine months before. In the bathroom we met three other Englishmen and two Yugoslavs. Hawksworth, a sapper captain, with his sergeant, Shenton, who had been captured from the Mihailovitch Mission, and Gunner Gray, from Albania, where he had been at 'Sea View' with Anthony Quayle. The Yugoslavs were Johnny

Potochnik, a naval wireless operator who had been working in the Adriatic islands, and Kyril Sabadosh, a big, bullet-headed officer of the Yugoslav Air Force, who had flown a plane to Russia when the Germans invaded, had worked his way down to the Middle East, gone to America with the Yugoslav squadron and come back as a navigator with the American Air Force in Italy. During a raid over the Balkans, Sabadosh had baled out, when the aircraft had stalled in a cloud, and he had landed safely only to be captured by the Germans. These five had also been warned for Vienna.

While we were under the showers, Gunner Gray talked to me, telling me his story of how he had been captured while left on his own. He came from Liverpool, where he had been concerned with the butchery trade and had been an amateur drummer in a dance band.

We joined up with the five of them next morning in the entrance hall. Vercoe and I were hoisted into a lorry on stretchers, while the others stood around us with the guards. We drove through the outskirts of the town to the station. The bombing had done a fair amount of damage to buildings and streets near the railway and had completely smashed up the lines in the station, though the station buildings were more or less intact. We were carried four hundred yards down the line before we came to the train for Vienna, which pulled out slowly over a hastily repaired embankment, across the big river bridge. Several bombs had gone right through the metal construction without damaging the bridge enough to stop trains running. We soon reached open country and trundled along a huge corn-growing plain, the fields stretching as far as the eye could see on both sides of the line. The peasant farmers had a distinct Hungarian look about them, with perfect curled moustaches as worn by

old-fashioned cavalry officers. Horse-drawn carts were everywhere and the villagers were gay in their clothes.

We crossed a wide river at Novi Sad and pulled up at the station, with a football match in progress at the stadium beside it, a fast and lively game. Here a wheel of our carriage was found to be faulty and there was a long delay while an endeavour was made to find another carriage, without success.

'What does it matter if they are killed,' said the Railway Transport Officer. 'They have kept the war going as long as this instead of admitting they are beaten.'

We trundled on with the wheel knocking, but it did not seem to get any worse, and the guards were not worried about it, so it could not have been all that bad. We ran into a blacked-out Budapest in the middle of the night, reached Bratislava (Pressburg) soon after dawn and ran into Vienna station in the middle of the morning. There were no stretchers for Victor and me, so we were laid on a trolley and wheeled to the Black Maria at the station entrance. The others went off without us.

We were taken to a jail in the centre of the town and lay for some hours in the entrance hall. Here we talked to jailers, to detectives, to sentries, and even to some political prisoners on their way to the condemned wing. There were executions every Friday morning, they said, and those going out to their death would cry out, 'Avenge us, avenge us.' Their blood was taken by doctors for transfusions before they were killed. Our informants looked like university students, and were full of courage when we saw them disappearing through the big doors.

We talked to a uniformed Austrian detective, Eduard Eckhardt, who was helpful and ordered food for us, told us of conditions in Vienna and how the

war had affected them. In the afternoon we were taken off by him in another Black Maria, which he called a 'Green Henry.' Loaded in with us were a group of young men and girls, criminals of various kinds, in handcuffs. We did a 'milk-round' of all the jails in Vienna, picking up and setting down prisoners at every stop. Vienna as seen through the grille of a prison van is not the city of wine, women, song and laughter that I had always pictured, though I did see some well-dressed girls and some bright shop windows.

We ended up outside the doors of the Foreign Workers' Punishment Camp at Ober Lanzendorf. It was a grim-looking barracks, with a block to each nationality. Here the foreign workers were given corrective punishment for slacking or malingering. We joined with Hawksworth and the others in a large room marked '*Im Arrest.*' The floor was mud, the windows were barred and the room stank. The cause was not far to seek. In a corner stood a large container which had been used by previous inmates as a lavatory. It had not been emptied for a long time and was overflowing. Hawksworth had already complained to the orderly officer, and I repeated the complaint that British officers and soldiers were placed in a filthy room like this, which was a disgrace to the German Army. The staff at this camp were all S.S. who had been wounded or ill at the front and had been sent back for a rest or because they were no longer any use as fighting men. The orderly officer said he had already spoken to the Commandant, and the medical inspection room was being prepared for us as a dormitory. We were shortly moved into it, a clean tiled room, with beds and blankets. A Gestapo officer at Belgrade, in the air-raid shelter, had told me, 'The Germans would consider themselves the Master Race if it were not for the British, who always

prove a stumbling block to them. The Russians are very primitive; the Americans rely on material; the Germans are not inferior to them, but the British always seem to prove just superior to us.' I was to remember his words and trade on them throughout my time as a prisoner.

Our first night we were awakened at three in the morning by the sentry banging on the window and shouting, '*R'aus! R'aus!*', expecting us to get outside into the rain and stand there in the open for three hours before being taken off to work. This was one of the punishments. However, five British heads came out of five German blankets, and shouted back at the sentry in one indignant roar, '*Fugg off!*' and the sentry was so amazed he departed, and we were not disturbed again on other mornings.

Outside in the courtyard we could see the wretched foreign workers standing in the cold rain in their national groups, their clothes thin, ragged and dirty, offering little protection against the early-morning cold. When any German passed them they had to doff their hats quickly, or they suffered a clout or a kick, accompanied by shouts and threats. There was nothing they could do in retaliation, they just had to take it. At 6 a.m. cans of thin soup were brought from the kitchen into the yard and mugs or tins passed round the squads, with a slice of black bread for each man. Away the squads were then marched to work in the factories of Vienna Neustadt. They came back at 6 p.m. and stood in the courtyard for their evening soup before being locked up for the night in their block. We were taken across the yard once a day to the lavatory, and as we passed a block we were surprised to hear Englishwomen's voices. We tried to converse with them and find out who they were and where they came from but the guards spoilt all our attempts, and we were only able to

report when we reached home that there had been Englishwomen imprisoned there.

Hawksworth ran foul of the Commandant by trying out his German speech on a sentry and asking how long his sentry beat lasted. The soldier told him six hours, when Hawksworth said British sentries were better off, doing two hours on and four off. Soon after, the Commandant appeared, accusing him of trying to cause disaffection amongst German guards and stirring up trouble generally. A shouting match ensued, and the Commandant ended up by saying he was sending us to a hospital in the hills, where we would be well looked after.

In the morning S.S. guards came with a lorry to take us to a station in Vienna, for once again we were starting on a train journey, jammed in an uncomfortable carriage with armed sentries standing over us. 'Green Henry,' as Vercoe had christened the detective, rode with us, having discarded his green police uniform and donned a mountaineer's kit, including a much-badged hat to announce his climbs, perhaps to impress the British. He knew all the country well, and pointed out landmarks to us as we went along. The train ran west on the north bank of the Danube, up which tugs were struggling to tow strings of heavily laden barges, and were only just managing to stem the stream. I was disappointed in the great river—one had always heard it described as the 'blue' Danube, but, in fact, it was chocolate brown with swirling mud running at a great pace. Perhaps this was a bad time of year to see it, with the snows melting in the Alps. Both banks were white with fruit blossom in the orchards, and the grass was the richest of greens. On our bank we were shown the castle where Richard Cœur de Lion had been imprisoned on his way back from Palestine. We felt Richard had nothing over us! On the other bank stood the castle

of Melk, with the famous library, gold leaf ceiling and early examples of the Bible. In better times it would have been a journey well worth making, but the uncertainty of our life as prisoners rather took the gilt off the gingerbread. We asked 'Green Henry' what was our destination, and after some pressing he told us, rather reluctantly we thought, that we were going to Mauthausen, not far from Linz, a tollgate for the river traffic in the old days when they had chains stretched across the river to stop gate-crashers. What was this hospital we had been told about? we asked him. Well, he was quite sure we would be all right there, he hedged, and that was all we could get out of him.

At the station a closed van was waiting for us, and the detective apologised that a better vehicle was not available, but there had been a rush on transport and rather than wait for something better he was using this. We could not make out why a civilian detective was conducting us. We were met by an S.S. officer of the Adolf Hitler Division. We drove uphill but could not see out or tell where we were being taken. The van drew up at some gates, which were opened for us with a loud drawing of bolts, then we drove on for a short while before stopping at a building, where we were told to get out. 'Green Henry' handed us over to a Gestapo *Feldwebel* and departed after wishing us luck.

The windows were all barred and the doors also, and tied to the iron bars on both were purple curtains, which gave a sinister rather than a cheerful air. A clerk appeared with a typewriter and made a list of our few belongings. One of the few good points our captors could be given was for their honesty over prisoners' private possessions, which might be taken from them but were passed from prison to prison until they were returned at the end of hostilities and a

receipt taken. I wish the British Army was as careful. A Gestapo officer once said to me, 'We Germans are not thieves.'

'Well, that depends,' I replied. 'I agree you do not thief prisoners' small kit, but you are not particular about hanging, drawing or quartering man, woman or child. I doubt if the occupied countries would give you a clear chit from taking valuable property.'

A large blackboard gave the daily 'In' and Out' state of the inmates of the prison by classes. There were murderers, thieves, saboteurs, deserters, political detainees and so on. The *Feldwebel* scratched his head, unable to decide which group we came under, and then, with a quick flourish of his chalk, he entered us as 'Homosexuals'! It was all the same to him.

We were then put into cells, Vercoe with me, and we were both very tired after the journey. His broken thigh must have given him hell, but he never complained and was always cheerful. After a while the tramp of many boots was heard in the stone passage, the door was opened, and outside we saw the Commandant of Mauthausen, Oberst Franz Zeireis, a man famous for his cruelty throughout Germany, who was responsible for 122,706 Allied prisoners being done to death in that prison, and met his death trying to escape when the American 11th Armoured Division, Third Army, arrived. With him was Hauptmann Bachmayer, the Assistant Commandant, who had greeted us on our arrival with a tirade of abuse and had screamed at Vercoe that he knew how to treat a captain of bandits. We would soon see!

Zeireis was adopting a pose—hands on hips, head held back, one foot behind the other. His staff surrounded him. He said to me, through his interpreter, 'I am a German regular officer, of colonel's rank, and I have eighteen years' regular service.'

'That is nothing,' I said to the interpreter, 'I am a

regular British officer, one rank higher than he is and having twenty-four years' regular service I huff him by six years.'

The interpreter looked rather worried and asked me, 'Do you really want me to tell him that?'

'Of course,' I replied.

He put it over. The Commandant was surprised.

'So, so, *Aktiv*?' he enquired.

I repeated that I was a Regular. He said, 'You should not have been sent here. Do you know where you are?'

'Yes,' I replied. 'We are at Mauthausen.'

'Where else have you been?'

I told him.

'How do you know?' he asked.

'We find out without difficulty.'

He then said, 'I will not be responsible for you here. I will telephone to Vienna and have you sent back there tomorrow.'

I said, 'I will not go without the others who came with me.'

He agreed that they should go too. I did not really believe him. We were always being told moonshine stories of our future moves, and this was likely to be yet another of them. I asked if we could have some food, as we had had nothing all day and it was now evening. The Commandant gave orders at once.

'Is there anything else you want?' he asked.

I flew high. 'Yes, we would like beds, sheets and blankets. My officers and n.c.o.s have had no cigarettes for a long time. We could also do with some beer, and I would like my wounds to be dressed.'

The Commandant gave more orders. He then gave me his opinion that the British were frightened to invade France and meet the pick of the German Army—all they could do was drop bombs on innocent women and children. He would bet me that the

British would not invade France, the stake a good dinner in Berlin after the war. I said that no hotel in Berlin would be left standing after the war. He wished us goodnight and a good journey next day.

Vercoe and I looked at each other when the door closed, and wondered just what would happen to us next morning. We were made even more suspicious by the arrival of beds and bedding, food, beer and cigarettes. What was behind it? Was he saluting us as about to die? We did not bother much. We ate the gluey barley soup and the black bread, and drank the feeble beer.

A Czech doctor, himself a prisoner, in the blue and white striped clothing as worn in civilian prison camps, came to attend to me. As he put on the dressings, he told us in whispers that the camp was '*Vernichtungslager, dritte Klasse*' (extermination camp, third class), that the camp was very crowded, the gardens very beautiful. Methods of killing prisoners varied from freezing them with hoses in the open in winter weather, to gas chambers and the staircase of death, where prisoners had to carry heavy stones from a quarry up a steep stairway until they collapsed from exhaustion. He told us that we were in the condemned cells, hence the purple curtains. He himself had been in Mauthausen for a long time, his calling as a doctor having saved him so far, though why a doctor was wanted when prisoners were put to death on such a large scale he did not know. After he had gone, Vercoe and I agreed that it was a bad show their putting us into a third-class *Vernichtungslager*, and we would complain in the morning to the Commandant and demand removal to a first-class camp for extermination!

We slept well in the sheets. We were roused at dawn and taken to a wash-room where we shaved and brushed-up before more gluey barley was brought

for breakfast. The orderly officer then ordered us to get ready to move to the station, and we were taken out of the cells, given back our small kit and embussed in the same 'Green Henry.' As we drove out of the prison young S.D. n.c.o.s were practising communication drill, shouting orders to each other at the tops of their voices. The gates clanged behind us and we moved downhill to the station, leaving a trail of dust behind.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

JUST WHY we were let out I do not know, except that the German is a great respecter of the regular soldier, and Col. Zeireis did what he could for me, as one regular to another. From German officers in other camps I afterwards learnt that dispatch to Mautausen was equivalent to sentence of death, and they could not believe that we had got out safely after once being admitted.

In the train we were given good food by the small guard—hard-boiled eggs, liver sausage and wine. The conducting officer spent most of his time flirting with women in the carriage, and the sentries were asleep more than awake. We went on the same line we had come over the day before, through the orchards laden with blossom, with the Danube flowing fast beside the line. At Vienna we were met by a Gestapo officer and military police escort. For the first and only time in my captivity I rode in a big Gestapo staff car, bearing the skull and crossbones on each mudguard. I had a good look at Vienna, which at that time seemed unharmed by bombs. One big building was housing a military exhibition in which was being shown Randolph Churchill's kit, which had been captured at Tito's H.Q. in Yugoslavia in a raid by paratroopers. Huge posters described the incident.

I enjoyed the ride, brief though it was. The sun was shining and Vienna was looking well. We were in an open car with a good view, and the captain pointed out the landmarks as we went slowly through the streets. The shop windows had nothing very much

in them, what there was seemed mostly gay window-dressing. As we drew near the military prison at Hartmuttgasse 42, the captain explained that he was afraid that the accommodation we were going to was not of the best and rather crowded, as he had had little warning of our arrival and had not had time to find somewhere suitable for my rank. He could not have made a truer statement. The military prison was packed with German and Austrian soldiers and occasional British and French. All five of us British were put into a single cell in which two double bunks had been placed and one wall fixture for a bed made the fifth bunk. Vercoe and I had the two lower bunks, as we could not climb into the upper. Above us slept Bdr. Gray and Sgt. Shenton. Hawksworth had the lone bunk. The weather was hot, the only window small and barred, and with five of us in a cell meant for one, the atmosphere grew somewhat continental, especially as a closet was built into the cell and had to be used. There was no going out into the passage. Food was pushed through a trap in the door, tin bowls of so-called soup which might well have been made of grass. There was nothing to do except lie on our bunks and talk.

The prison was built around a small courtyard and was about eight storeys high, so that noises from squads drilling down below were very marked. Air raids on Vienna started and the flak guns opened up, but nothing dropped near us. We went on talking. A previous occupant had drawn a calendar on the bunk above, and had crossed off the days for eleven months. I hoped I should not have to remain there for that time.

On the sixth day I was moved up to the floor above and put in a cell by myself. It was my first taste of solitary confinement, but I think I preferred it to the lack of privacy with four others in a single cell. The

lack of companionship at first was difficult, but I had got used to that in the *Wehrmacht* hospitals. To keep my mind occupied I used to think of all the tunes I knew and follow them through in my head, never whistling, singing or humming them, just thinking of them—opera, march tunes, dance music, ballet, church music, hymns, anthems, glees, madrigals and chimes. The rules of the game allowed no pause between one tune and another, and I found I could continue for two and a half hours before my brain failed.

Another way of passing the time was to plan routes about the country and drive a car along them, naming streets passing through towns, stopping at hotels for meals. With nothing to read and no writing materials I had to devise these means of avoiding boredom. I asked for exercise in the small courtyard as I was able by now to get up and down stairs with a little aid. Our party was given half an hour daily in the courtyard, which gave those fit time to stretch their legs and gave Vercoe and me a chance to talk while we circulated slowly. On the first day we went down the stairs, the inmates of the lower cells called out to us and sang 'God Save The King,' though who they were we could not discover. Next day their cell windows had been bricked up, just to discourage conversation.

I had also asked for a shower bath, and, my request being granted, I was taken down to the bathroom by a corporal and shut in. Using the showers were three other members of S.O.E., a Tank Corps officer, Capt. Watts, and two sergeants, Robinson and Cornwall, who had jumped into the Balkans but fallen amongst a Bulgarian company and been captured straight away. When I first saw them they had been in Gestapo hands and had been badly treated, being struck in the face when interrogated and pretty

well starved. Watts was a big man but was down to nothing but a bag of bones, his ribs were sticking out, and there was little flesh on his arms and legs. He just had time to tell me his story when a *Feldwebel* discovered the mistake that had been made in shutting us up together in the shower, and hurried them back to their cells, while I did what I could to clean myself with *ersatz* soap that resembled lumps of clay. Watts and Co. had done four months' solitary in Slovenia.

There was great interest at this time amongst the sentries to know if and when we would invade the Continent, and whenever there was an opportunity, an Austrian soldier would unlock the door to admit a second soldier, who would try and find out my views about the likelihood of an invasion succeeding. On June 6th, at 9 a.m., the whole prison started buzzing like a hive of bees—it was a noise of men calling quietly from cell to cell by the windows, the sum of the sounds making a high-pitched buzzing. A key turned in the lock of my door, a steel-hatted face looked in with a finger to lips, and from under his uniform coat the sentry produced a newspaper, a *Donau Zeitung* (*Danube News*). He hissed, 'Invazion!' and withdrew. I grabbed the paper and read it stealthily on my bed, where I could hide it quickly if disturbed. The front page had a huge heading—'Invazion—auf Moskaus Befehl!'—by Moscow's order! There was a small sketch of the English Channel and arrows pointing to the Cherbourg peninsula. A description followed of how a sentry of a flak battery, on duty five miles from the coast, had seen, at midnight, gliders descending on all sides of him. He had been decorated with an Iron Cross for being the first man to report the invasion. The weather was rough, the report said, and unsuitable for landing-craft, so that no build-up need be expected and 'those small British

forces that had landed from the sea and the air would be quickly wiped out.' It was known that this was a diversionary thrust, and more news would follow as the invasion developed.

What pleased me was the fact that the landings had obviously been a complete surprise, and, if the first the Germans had known of them had been by a flak sentry five miles inland at midnight, the rough weather had obviously deceived them and made them less alert. Their reconnaissance aircraft could not have penetrated the English coast to find the troops embarking in their landing-craft. I remembered that in England we had done several model exercises on just this strip of the French coast, but were always told that there was no significance in the choice of the locality, it just happened that we had a lot of unused French maps from before Dunkirk. As the fighter umbrella in those days would only have covered across the Straits of Dover, we were not suspicious of exercises near the Cherbourg peninsula. Nor, apparently, were the Germans. The range of our fighters had increased considerably without their being aware of it.

The day after the invasion we were all moved by road to Stalag XVIIA, a camp for n.c.o.s and men of all nationalities at Kaisersteinbruch, south-east of Vienna and not far from Bratislava in Czechoslovakia. We were warned by the conducting officer that if any attempt at escape was made by any of us, the escort had orders to shoot to kill. There was no opportunity, however, to make an attempt, even for the fit members of the party, as we were to ride in a covered-in lorry, with an armed guard outnumbering us sitting beside us. XVIIA was a large camp of huts surrounded with barbed wire, on a big plain.

We halted at the '*Im Arrest*' section, where a reception committee of Commandant, Adjutant and

Sonder Fuehrers was awaiting us. We were stripped naked and searched. I was put in solitary confinement again in a row of single cells, while the others of my circus were placed in one large cell. In my row of cells were Serbians, and many Frenchmen who had escaped and been captured or who had been promiscuous with German or Austrian women on farms on which they had been working. The German women were sentenced to three years' hard labour for their part in the transaction. The French adjutant in the cell next to me had escaped to France three times, he told me, and each time had been betrayed to the Germans by Vichyites in his own town of La Rochelle. Judging by remarks written on the walls of my cell, several South Africans and Rhodesians had passed through recently. Three American officers also arrived and were placed together in a single cell two doors from me—Col. Florimond Du Soissoit Duke, Capt. Nunn and Suarez. They had been dropped near Budapest recently, not knowing that the Germans were just about to enter the town. Accordingly they were quickly betrayed and captured, were taken to Berlin and back before coming to Kaisersteinbruch. Duke was a tall, thin officer of signals, an advertisement agent of the paper *Time* of New York. With a brushed-up moustache and humorous twinkle in his eye, Duke was a great asset to our circus. I shall never forget his story of the Negress in the cinema who was feeling hysterical.

We were allowed into a barbed-wire pen about half the size of a tennis court for an hour daily. Three sentries stood outside the wire in the 'rabbit shoot' position, finger on trigger. Vercoe and Sabadosh were most useful here, as they used to converse with the Russians in the next pen and persuade them to make slippers for us out of old tents. The Russians were hard-treated, herded into long huts, slept on long

racks, were dressed in old uniforms, given the worst of food and worked hard. They kept themselves clean and showed a correct attitude to the Germans. We formed good impressions of them as prisoners and there was no doubt that the Germans took them seriously. They were not likely to get much sympathy on their return to Russia, they said—so many Russians had deserted to the Germans, it would be difficult to discriminate between the good and the bad.

There was a British section in the camp, for six hundred w.o.s, n.c.o.s and men, but we were not allowed contact with them. We did however manage to send a message to them by Potochnik signalling Morse through the cell windows with his hands to some Yugoslavs who relayed it. The Camp Leader, a Sgt.-Major Brown, from Headington, Oxford, made his way into the Russian baths, which we visited every ten days, undressed and stood under a shower with me, where we had a long talk without being detected and I was able to give him our case histories to pass on to representatives of the Red Cross, who were to visit the British camp in the near future. He was able to send in to us Red Cross parcels, which were a godsend after the daily prison rations we had been having for such a long time:

Four slices of doughy black bread, largely made of potatoes;
one small portion of margarine or jam substitute;
one mess-tin of soup or poor quality cereals;
one portion of *Kartoffel*, potatoes of poor quality, or kohlrabi;
once a week a slice of *Wurst* sausage or a small piece of cheese.

The standard content of one Canadian Red Cross parcel, which was excellent in a cell without cooking facilities, was: One tin of butter (1 lb.); one tin of

jam or marmalade; one tin of whole milk ('Klim'); one tin of salmon; one tin of bully beef; one tin of Spam; one packet of tea or coffee; one tin of cheese; one tin of prunes; one tin of raisins; one tin of chocolate; one tin of sugar; one tin of salt and pepper; one piece of soap; and a packet of biscuits.

On this ration we thrived and put on weight, and it was good to see Watts's starving bones covered up with flesh again. English parcels were very good, but more suitable for a mess with cooking facilities. My fifty cigarettes I exchanged for sugar or chocolate, as I do not smoke. We were delighted to receive also some novels and books from the Y.M.C.A. and Red Cross.

As a result of Sgt.-Major Brown's representations, Rudolph Denxler, Swiss delegate for the Protecting Power, visited me with the German Commandant, and I protested to him at the way we were being held, without a charge, in an 'other ranks' camp, in arrest. The Commandant replied that he had been ordered to take special measures of security against us, as we were 'special' prisoners and, '*Befehl ist Befehl*'—orders are orders. The increased security measures included bars being put on all doors and windows, in addition to those already there, lavatory windows bricked up, all barbed-wire fencing doubled, doors lined with $\frac{1}{4}$ -inch steel plate, and all guards had recognition training on us at times of *Spazieren* or exercise. It was all very flattering, even the ridiculous sight of Vercoe, with all his injuries and broken leg, sitting on the lavatory, his crutches leaning against him, threatened by a sentry with loaded rifle and fixed bayonet. Other sentries were more kind-hearted, and Florimond Duke was expert at getting round them from the bars of his cell, demanding '*Paradis*,' the tomatoes that they were growing in the garden, until they picked them and passed them up to him on the points of their bayonets.

There was a regular interchange of news from cell to

cell, calling from the small window to neighbouring cells, 'Hullo, No. 3, what news of the invasion?'

'Hullo, No. 1, the fat Austrian *Postern* (sentry) at midday said the German tank divisions have come down to Falaise from Calais, but the British and Americans are holding them—all going well. There is a South African Medical Corps Indian in No. 8 now, captured at Tobruk, who has been taken round by the *Luftwaffe* as officers' mess servant—called Mathews. Anything from you?'

'No, nothing. Hell of a lot of fleas in my mattress wood shavings—I'm eaten alive.'

The Americans had brought from Budapest jail the tune of a hymn, to which Nunn had set appropriate verses, the last lines of which ran:

'The day will come, without a doubt,
When you'll be in and we'll be out.'

All our row of cells used to chorus this at sundown, to the visiting rounds of the orderly officer, when he came to *kontrol* our section. With the war running to its close this ditty was particularly apt, and cheered us up greatly, while it annoyed the Germans intensely.

Much of my time was spent standing on my two-plank bed looking out of the window across the plain towards Vienna and watching the air raids, which were becoming more and more frequent on the oil works and the factories. It was very seldom we saw a plane brought down, though the flak was exceptionally thick, and it was incredible how the odd aircraft, which had lost formation, continued to fly away with, seemingly, the whole of the flak resources of Vienna district shooting at it. How our hearts went up to those gallant crews, wishing them a safe return, even if they dropped their bombs near the camp to unload. At night we had a front seat for the firework displays, as the 'markers' went down and the bombs followed

them. After the raids the neighbourhood was strewn with 'window,' silver strips of paper to fox the German radar.

Close beside the camp was a battle school, where formations were sent to polish up their movement with fire before going to the front. I was interested in the animal management of the *Wehrmacht*, horses, both riding and pack, being kept in the most perfect condition, with well-fitting saddlery. I could never understand why some units had no pride in their animals, which were in poor condition, had been overworked and under-fed, with badly fitting harness. I asked the orderly officer why this was so. He replied, 'Oh, those are prisoner-of-war horses.'

'What do you mean,' I asked, 'were they captured in bad condition like that?'

'Oh, no,' he said, 'but they were captured from the Poles and the French. Therefore they have twice as much work on half rations. You do not expect us to treat them the same as our own good German horses, do you?'

Again I was amazed, and realised that we should never see eye to eye with the Germans, whose mentality is such that they can take out of animals the defeat of their masters.

Across the road was a swimming bath for the camp staff and their families, which was much used when the weather got warm. At this time a great wooden hoarding was erected outside my window, which prevented me from seeing out at all, and made the cell dark and gloomy. I complained to the *Feldwebel*, and was told, 'My General-Major, before you came there were soldiers of various European countries in this cell, and, after you have gone, they will be here again. Across the road is our swimming bath, in which our *Mädchen* disport themselves. Just before you came, the previous occupant undressed until he was naked, and

then sat up on the window-sill making passes at the girls, who objected strongly, of course. We are therefore cutting off the view. I suggest you ask to be moved to the other side of the building, where you will not get such a good view, but there is plenty of light and good air.'

This was unfortunate, as I had been able to keep in touch with the Camp Leader through the various British working parties that passed occasionally. Outside, in the road, their bootlaces frequently came undone, so that they were forced to kneel down to do them up, and this gave me a chance to shout out a message from inside the cell. In this way I passed a message to my wife in England by a soldier who relayed it through another soldier who was being repatriated for ill health.

One of the worst features of this life was the constant tramp of the boots of sentries on concrete paths outside the window and inside in the corridor, with the incessant jangle of keys, locking and unlocking doors. The sentries generally tried at least six keys before they found the right one. At night they entered my cell every two hours and made sure that I was there. Every sentry looked in frequently through the peep-hole in the door, which was covered by a movable plate, so that I would look up on hearing the footsteps cease and see an eye peering in suspiciously. I used the peep-hole in reverse to watch two swallows nesting in the passage on an electric-light shade. I saw them bringing the first mud for the foundations of the nest and gradually, as the weight of the nest increased, the shade tilted until the birds had to compensate in their building to keep the eggs from falling out. Eventually they were satisfied and mother bird laid her eggs and began sitting. I watched her until the young swallows were hatched and I could see their beaks just showing above the nest. The father

swallow brought food to the family. The mother taught the young birds to balance on the edge of the nest before they flew, and she was particular to keep the nest clean by getting rid, overboard, of any droppings. Eventually both father and mother took a hand at teaching them to fly down the corridor, but they had difficulty at the window, as it had been barred with strands of barbed-wire, and for several nights they brought them back to the nest before they succeeded in getting them through the window safely. I was sorry when they left. They had been a great interest to me, and I had passed many an hour watching them through the spyhole at a distance of three feet.

We had another nature lesson in the exercise pen, watching a mole cricket burrowing into the hard ground with its strong shield and powerful legs.

As a result of the hoarding having been put across my window I was moved into a small room on the other side of the building, and Col. Duke—he called himself ‘Dook’—was moved in with me. We would have been comfortable there; it was clean and light and we had a barrack-room bed each and a table. No sooner were we in, however, than we were warned for *Transport*, which meant we were being moved again, to a destination undisclosed.

We were assembled in the hall, thirteen of us. To our consternation a Green Police jailer appeared, an unpleasant man if ever there was one, who had come especially from Vienna jail to chain us up for the journey. An order from the O.K.W. (*Ober Kommando Wehrmacht*) Headquarters was read out that all prisoners were to be chained, when travelling, to stop them escaping and causing embarrassment at a time when Germany was very busy. Identity discs were to be given up. Without them we would be shot on capture.

I refused point-blank to be chained, and so did all

the others. The camp orderly officer was upset at the order and did not want to enforce it. The jailer was all for using force and taking no nonsense from us. The deadlock persisted. The orderly officer said that the Commandant and the rest of the staff were out of camp, it being Sunday, so he had no one to rescind the order; that if we continued to refuse to be chained we would lose the train, and that would mean that we would not go to an Oflag in Germany, which was a good deal better than this. The order was a general order all over Germany and was not particular to us. We would be wise to submit to it and get to a better place. I still felt stubborn but knew that my stubbornness would recoil on the others' heads and they were pretty uncomfortable in Kaisersteinbruch, a good deal more uncomfortable than I was. I was anxious to get Vercoe into an English doctor's hands. I talked it out with Duke and then told the others I thought it would be best to go to an Oflag, even in chains.

Meantime, the jailer was standing fuming, swinging his keys and his chains. I told the orderly officer we were ready to go. We were then chained in pairs by the wrist, except for Vercoe, who was on crutches. Duke and I must have made a comical pair, as he was a good deal taller than I was, but we were in no mood for laughter and felt the whole business to be thoroughly degrading.

We moved off at once in lorries to the siding of a station, where we were entrained into a cattle truck with straw on the floor. Eleven of us occupied one-third of the wagon and were hemmed in by a barbed-wire knife-rest. The guard occupied two-thirds of the wagon. We started without much delay, a long train of the same type of cattle truck as we were occupying which was carrying prisoners to various camps in Germany. As soon as we began to move, the guard commander said he would remove our chains but

would have to replace them for road movement when we reached our destination in Saxony. We crowded down in the straw and slept. It was an uncomfortable journey, and boring; without standing up we could not see out of the grille window, and the inside of the wooden truck was gloomy and the rhythm of the wheels monotonous. Every bridge and tunnel was guarded at both ends, for fear of sabotage, so that the figures for guard battalions must have been very high.

In the morning we halted at a big junction and were allowed out, in pairs and in chains, for calls of nature, beside the line, while a ring of armed sentries stood over us in case we should make a break. It would have been an embarrassing business but, by now, we were growing hardened in our feelings, and indignities no longer troubled us. I was ready to get back into the truck, but had to stand patiently beside Duke while he remained in a crouching posture. A passenger train went by with girls laughing at us, but nothing would hurry Duke, who said the *Postern* (sentries) could wait for him.

We went through Regensburg and saw some long troop-trains on their way to the Eastern Front, with much of their transport, British and American, converted to German use. Jeeps seemed popular, but looked unusual under German camouflage and markings. As the train ran into Colditz the guard commander chained us up again. The station was fairly full of German civilians waiting for a train, and we felt most self-conscious as we were marched down the platform to the transport waiting for us. We could see a small country town on the River Mulde, overlooked by a sixteenth-century *Schloss* on a hill, an old hunting lodge of Augustus the Strong, King of Poland. It all looked rather peaceful and attractive, but we were tired from the journey and irked by the chains, and standing up in a coal cart is not the best

way to travel through a strange town. We were still not certain what this new camp might be; we had been told so many untrue destinations, and arrived in one grimy prison after another; we were not inclined to believe anything until we could see for ourselves. As the cart arrived at one large gate, and then a second, and halted at a third, heads began popping out of windows above us, filled with curiosity for the new arrivals. But before we could get in touch with them we were taken into a guard-room and the chains were removed. The Security Officer, Hauptmann Eggers, spoke English reasonably well. He told us we had reached Oflag IVc, a special camp for British officers who were confirmed escapers or who needed special guarding. We were taken to the bath-house for showers. At once Chesshire appeared outside the window and told me his news since he had left me in Tirana Hospital six months ago. Sgt. Smith had gone to a R.A.F. camp. Capt. Trayhorn, my signals officer, had also arrived here.

After bathing, I went to see the senior British officer to tell him of the new arrivals. It was always necessary to check up carefully, in case the Germans should introduce spies to report on tunnelling or secret wireless sets or other activities. The S.B.O. offered to hand over his duties to me, but I asked him to carry on as I was not well enough nor strong enough to stand much strain—the end of the war could not be far off, and he knew all the inmates and what was necessary to safeguard their interests. I learnt that most of the officers had been captured at Dunkirk, Dieppe and St. Nazaire, had been in other camps but had escaped, some of them several times, until the Germans had turned Colditz into an escapers' camp. Amongst these veterans we felt like new boys. There was little that they did not know or had not done in the escaping line, or taunting the Germans and

causing as much trouble as was possible. Every officer and 'other rank' did his best, after capture, to regain liberty, and if that was not possible, to continue the struggle in captivity by some means or other. That they had kept up their spirits and continued the fight was most admirable. They damaged the German war effort in a hundred different ways, pouring scorn on them and defying them to the utmost. It was not only the British that caused trouble. Most Allied prisoners took up the task of making the Germans' life difficult, but the Poles, British and French were first in the bag and gained their experience early. Colditz was the home for the ones who caused most nuisance.

Although the officers in the castle were very experienced escapers and prisoners of war, they had been so long in captivity that they were years out of date from a military point of view and had no idea of the great progress that had been made since the days of Dunkirk. I was asked to give several talks in the theatre, suitably guarded, to tell what had happened at home since 1941 in training the great Allied combined-operations force that had landed successfully in Normandy. Acute interest was shown by the packed audience, which asked question after question, so hungry were they for news of conditions at home, from which a forecast could be made of the possible end of the war. There had been so many disappointments in the past.

The *Schloss* was situated between Leipzig to the north and Chemnitz to the south, Dresden was due east and the Leuna oil works to the west. We were well placed to see the massed bomber raids come into Germany through the last winter of the war, by day the Americans and by night the British. It was exhilarating to see the Lightning and Thunderbolt fighters weaving high above the Fortresses and

protecting them as they ran in, the leaders dropping their markers on the target area and climbing away to get out of the flak, to be followed by a droning procession of four-engined bombers. The air was thick with the black bursts of the shells, but I only once saw an aircraft go down in flames. By night the British bombers came in, not in formation but on a timed programme, in succession, and we could see the flak twinkling in the dark, the marker flares going down and the glow from the fires.

The big raid on Dresden went in right above us, and in the distance, to the east, the sky was ablaze with reflection on the clouds. A German sentry told me later that he lived in Dresden and had been there on leave during the raid. The town had been crowded to excess as the inhabitants of many towns closer to the Eastern Front had been evacuated to Dresden, which, up to then, had not suffered much from bombing. The big raid had caught them unawares, the incendiaries had caused a fire-storm, the tarmac was running down the roads alight and seeping into the houses and cellars. To escape this everyone crowded into the parks, when the bombing changed from incendiary to high explosives, causing very heavy casualties.

Leipzig was closer to us, so that we heard overhead many of the aircraft going in and coming out. The lights on the *Schloss* to prevent escapes were switched off as the raid grew close and did not go on again until it was well past. The final day raid of the war by British bombers on Leipzig was an extraordinary sight, as air superiority must have been assured to allow a thick stream of aircraft to fly in and out at about seven thousand feet, unaccompanied by fighters, to drop their bombs on the town and fly out like runners in a cross-country run, right in front of us.

About the time of Berlin becoming invested, many German officials must have left by air for the intended fortress in the south, as a heavy service of Junkers passenger aircraft flew north and south for three days.

In October I was sent for a medical board, with twelve other officers, through Leipzig and Torgau to Elsterhorst, a hospital north-east of Dresden, in the pine woods. There were signs of bombing all along the line, and Leipzig had received a lot of attention; the railway lines and sidings, as well as the platforms, had received many direct hits, but the big station building had escaped. We were taken into the huge restaurant, which was crowded with travellers, a glum, quiet atmosphere over all; they looked as if they were beaten and knew it. We had to walk through the middle of the big room, which must have held five hundred people, up the stairs, through a smaller room, also crowded, and into a private room. There was little interest taken in us as we passed. Food on the tables was meagre and uninteresting and obtained by ration coupons. I got the impression that the air-raid precautions were practical, well understood and carried out. Certainly the sirens were going on and off, day and night, wherever there was a manufacturing area, so there was good need for the civilians to be well drilled and of a stout heart. They took an awful hammering—we never experienced anything like it in this country.

We went on by train across the Elbe at Torgau into the heather country. At Elsterhorst we were accommodated in cells, fitted out with a bed, sheets and blankets, and a wash basin and mirror. Some attempt had been made to make the place comfortable, but no risks were evidently being taken with officers from Colditz, even if they were attending a repatriation board under the auspices of the Red Cross from the Protecting Power, Switzerland.

In the morning we were escorted on foot through a pine wood to the hospital, one sentry to each patient, the sentry with rifle loaded and fixed bayonet, although most of us were crocks in one way or another—Vercoe on crutches, others with walking-sticks—a sailor, an Australian, an airman, a motley collection. In the grounds of the hospital we went through a lane of German n.c.o.s with loaded, drawn pistols. Heads came out of the windows of the hutted wards occupied by British T.B. patients. They were quickly threatened by the guards with waving pistols and made to keep away from the windows. In this atmosphere of hysteria and tension we entered the hospital for our board.

In a ward each officer was allotted a bed and told to undress, when a number was hung around his neck. Sentries continued to guard us as we waited our turn to go before the board. My number was called and I was ushered into the next room and told to stand in a chalk circle on the floor. Floodlights played on me in my nudity. Before me was a long table at which sat the doctors. One German, two Swiss and one British watching. Behind me stood my sentry, with bayonet touching my buttocks. My case history was read out. One German and one Swiss doctor examined me cursorily, and told me to return to the ward. It was all over in less than three minutes and I was refused repatriation. Vercoe, however, was recommended. At last he could go home and receive some treatment for his broken leg. Out of thirteen of us, I think only three were successful, but the rest had been out of the *Schloss* for two days; had been at close quarters with the German population; had seen the results of Allied bombing and had experienced a somewhat unusual presentation to an international medical board. We had something fresh to talk about when we returned to Colditz.

Not long after, Vercoe departed for England, where he was operated on in the Morris Orthopædic Hospital at Headington, Oxford, and made a good recovery, subsequently receiving the M.B.E. for his fortitude and example.

The weather changed to hard, frosty conditions well before Christmas, with hoar-frosted patterns on windows, and white rime and icicles everywhere. Walking in the small sloping yard was perilous, as many people demonstrated by falling flat on their backs on the cobbles. For some officers it was their sixth Christmas in this atmosphere of claustrophobia, and for the majority their fifth. The main interest was in food and mail. For many weeks we had been on half Red Cross parcels, but they had run out completely now. Mess stooges had been saving up for weeks for the Christmas bash, and the senior British officer produced from his hidden locker one tin of some sort per head. On the 23rd these were drawn for in the theatre, with roars of applause from the queue when anyone drew a small tin of sardines, and groans and boos when a large pork and beans left the table. No mail arrived. Already the railways were becoming disorganised.

On Christmas Eve, the choir gave a carol service in the style of King's College, Cambridge, and later a casino provided baccarat, roulette, and crown and anchor for a crowded house.

At midnight the Goon *Postern* (German sentry) was astounded to see a large naked form flying three times round the courtyard in a temperature of 25 degrees of frost. This was Checko, a big, good-looking Czechoslovakian pilot in the R.A.F., one of the most popular figures in the camp owing to his success in the German black market, dealing for food and escaping gear. He had evidently lost a bet or was winning one.

Christmas church service, freezing cold, was followed by a *Flieger* alarm to cheer up the midday *Appel* in the frosty courtyard, when three skein of geese and some duck passed right overhead above the *Schloss*. The day finished with a pantomime in the Snow White tradition, directed by a superb comedian, 'Angus.'

It was a better Christmas than the last, when we were struggling against a blizzard on top of a mountain with no food and no prospects.

The last months of the war passed quickly, except for the anxious time of the Rundstedt offensive in the Ardennes. We were in touch with the B.B.C. news with a secret radio and knew the progress of the battles on all fronts, and how far we were from release. As the two armies closed in on them the Germans pulled back, with their retreating troops, all prisoner-of-war camps and foreign workers' camps, crowding them into other camps and making difficulties of feeding, accommodation and sanitation that need never have occurred had they let the camps be over-run. Their plan to occupy a defensive keep in the mountains to the south, continuing to manufacture essentials with foreign labour, proved quite impossible in practice.

Several *prominentes* from Colditz were removed to this keep on the night of April 12th—Lieut. Lord Lascelles, nephew of the King, the Master of Elphinstone, nephew of the Queen, Capt. Lord Haig, son of the Field-Marshal of first world war fame, Capt. Lord Hopetoun, son of Lord Linlithgow, Capt. Michael Alexander, cousin of Field-Marshal Alexander, Mr. Giles Romilly, nephew of Mr. Churchill, Lieut. Duhamel, a relative of Mr. Churchill, Lieut. John Winant, son of the American Ambassador to Great Britain, Gen. Bor-Komorowski, the commander of the Polish Underground Army.

All had been kept under special surveillance without explanation, but it was obvious that they were to be treated as hostages by Himmler should the situation deteriorate. I was closely interested in their future, as I was locked up at night in a small room next to theirs, guarded by the same sentry. During the night I heard noise coming from their room, but thought that I had been awakened by Lascelles playing a symphony on the gramophone, which he was apt to do at all hours. In the morning I found that all the others had been taken away to the fortress of Königstein, on the Elbe. From there they were moved south to Bavaria, to a camp for Dutch officers.

When an attempt was made to transfer them to Laufen with the Poles, Giles Romilly staged an escape, with a Dutch officer, leaving a rope hanging down a wall to suggest that all had escaped that way. But the others had been sealed into a hide in the camp and were not discovered for four days and then only after the camp buildings had been almost demolished in a search by three thousand Germans.

Their last move was to the Austrian Tyrol, not far from Berchtesgaden, and there, through the efforts of the Swiss, they were handed over to the Protecting Power by the S.S. Obergruppenführer Berger.

At last the battle grew within reach of us to the west; bombing and gunfire could be heard and aircraft could be seen diving to attack ground targets. A German division withdrew through Colditz, across the river, leaving the town to be held by a small garrison of German Home Guard and Hitler Youth, armed mainly with Panzer Fausts. An attempt was made to blow up the town bridge across the River Molde, with only partial success. We had a grand view of the battle that followed.

First, Sherman tanks were seen debouching from the pine woods across the river and making their way

towards Colditz. They were met by close range attacks by groups of tank destroyers firing the Panzer Fausts. Two Shermans were disabled. The tanks pulled back to the edge of the pine wood and from there shelled the outskirts of the town. The small German rearguard was to impose a delay of a day on the American 69th Infantry Division, supported by the 9th Armoured Division. They halted, they deployed and had to go through the whole procedure of reconnaissance, making plans for an attack with a river crossing. They were not to know how small was the opposition and they could not find out without fighting for the information. An infantry attack was developed on the right flank, artillery deployed on the left, the Sherman tanks poured shells into the town from the centre. Allied flags were rapidly hung out of the *Schloss* windows to save us being shelled by our own side; they had been made and left concealed for this very purpose. A few cannon shells burst on the walls of the castle and gave our onlookers a reminder that it was safer to keep away from the windows. It was soon obvious that Colditz would not fall before morning. Incendiary shells landed in the town all night and soon fires were blazing, throwing up showers of sparks and smoke.

On Sunday, April 15th, an American battalion commanded by Lieut.-Col. Shaugnessey entered the great gates of the *Schloss*. We were free!

The German staff were rounded up and placed under arrest, with the exception of Pupke, the *Lager* officer, who had at all times been fair, though strict. In contrast to the other Germans he was generally respected and his attitude never varied. We were determined that he should receive some consideration for this and so we took him with us as far as the airfield, where we recommended him to the American security police and asked them to look after him.

In the German quarters were found large quantities of champagnes and wines pillaged from France.

The German *Kommandantura* was raided for documents which might implicate the German authorities and I was glad to find that my own documents were marked with a small red enamel tab denoting that I had been marked as a '*Deutsch Feindlich*,' an enemy of Germany of a dangerous type.

'The day had come without a doubt.

Now they were in and we were out.'

It was good to see the American G.I.s everywhere, searching, checking, tuning their wireless sets to dance bands, sleeping in their jeeps. They found a Jewish camp in a factory in the town, with the few surviving inmates reduced to a dreadful state of starvation and misery. We saw those wretched bodies carried out on stretchers and American doctors trying to give them some relief and comfort.

It was no wonder the G.I.s destroyed the German staff quarters, smashing good furniture and pictures in their anger.

The first jeep into the courtyard carried a dream for all eyes, a girl Press correspondent. Even the khaki clothes and the dust that covered her could not hide the fact that she was good-looking to a degree and knew the stir she was causing. We were told she was well known and had been up with the leading elements of the battle ever since Normandy.

I was taken, with Col. Duke, to the H.Q. of the 9th Armoured Division, where Gen. Leonard entertained me in his caravan and afterwards took me to meet his officers and lunch with them.

The division under his command was taking part in the battle for Leipzig. The situation map was explained to us and the general showed how we had purposely been included in its left wheel. All the

officers treated us with the greatest kindness and I will always remember that happy luncheon with the commanding general presiding. I asked him if he could arrange for the p.o.w.s from Oflag IVc to be flown to England as soon as possible, as most of the officers had endured four or five years' imprisonment. The general promised to do his best.

We spent the next two days wandering freely about the countryside, but it was still not safe to go far afield, as some French officers learnt when they were recaptured by the Germans.

Before we could get into any serious trouble from our open right flank, a convoy of American lorries arrived at the *Schloss* to take us away to an airfield. Smoking fat cigars, the negro drivers took us through the gun areas of the batteries bombarding Leipzig while air observation posts, spotting for the guns, wheeled close over our heads. It was all very exhilarating.

I was driven in a commandeered Mercedes car by Tony Rolt, the British racing driver, who was so out of practice that the speed of the lorries alarmed him.

We spent the night on the airfield in the ruined buildings of a *Wehrmacht* airborne depot, which had, until recently, supplied troops on the Eastern Front from the air.

Next afternoon a fleet of Dakota aircraft landed to take us to Brussels, over the twisted bridges of the Rhine and away from the smoking ruins of destroyed towns.

We wondered at the construction of an airfield, the runways and taxi-tracks with metal perforated steel planking, at the aircraft refuelling, parked nose to tail, and the air so full of planes landing and taking off. The might of American air transport was something new to all of us. Soon we crossed the coast of Flanders, where defences were pock-marked with bomb craters.

Only a forced landing in the sea and the sudden appearance of a German U-boat could snatch our new freedom from us. Dover was below us where five years ago the destroyer *Black Swan* had disembarked me after the evacuation at Dunkirk.

Then Chatham, the Thames, and the murk of London. Our Dakota gave an almighty bump as we started to lose height for a landing near Aylesbury.

Jim Chesshire and I stepped on to English soil and solemnly shook hands. We had made it.

There followed disinfecting with D.D.T., a bumper tea, with a band playing, flags decorating the hangar, and beautiful W.A.A.F.s to wait on us. It was a good reception with everyone full of welcome.

We were distributed to houses in the neighbourhood, gardens lovely with lilac and laburnum, chestnut and may blossom. An English bobby on a bicycle was cheered to the echo.

I fell asleep early, exhausted by all the excitement. A kindly telephone girl operator passed a message while I slept to say that I was home safely.

POSTSCRIPT

IT WAS not until reaching London that I learnt that the reports given to me in hospital by the Germans of the deaths of Kemp, Riddle and Simcox were false. Hare had also come out safely.

To balance my relief at the survival of these officers came the shocking news of the death of my friend and chief staff officer, Arthur Nicholls.

My last sight of him was as he plodded wearily up the snow-covered ridge, while Chesshire lay wounded in the gully with me. Arthur's feet and hands were already in a bad way, with chilblains turned septic, and he was in no fit state to continue in these desperate conditions.

Arthur's diary says, 'Agonisingly slow progress is made, but miraculously we are not hit. We decide to try to hold some high ground but are dispersed by heavy and accurate rifle-fire at short range. All run for cover of the woods. There we lie up till dusk, when we set out to make a forced compass march across the mountains to Martanesh, aiming for the hut where Trayhorn used to have his wireless set. After appalling experiences in snowdrifts and freezing streams we arrive at 6 a.m. at our destination, having been continuously on the go since 5 p.m.'

It must have been a nightmare journey. As a trained staff officer Arthur was not one to give too lurid a description of what had happened. His diary was written as an account of conditions and happenings, and in no way underlines the tragedy of that twenty-four hours, when Arthur, with his commander suddenly gone, had to take over the responsibility

of the Mission and was forced to make a long march, through a January night, across a mountain top six thousand feet high. The despair must be realised of a sick, exhausted man, struggling on, fighting with his weary body not to give in.

There followed the finding at dawn of a known refuge, only to meet the blank refusal of the owner to take them in. More hours of rough walking brought them to the Vale track. They were to suffer disappointment again on reaching the village to see the charred remains of the houses freshly burnt by the Germans. A hut was found which would give some shelter, and there Arthur collapsed asleep.

By now the news of the break-up of the Mission H.Q. had spread and no peasant would risk incriminating his family by caring for the British survivors of the tragedy. As soon as the presence of strangers in the outskirts of the village became known it was safer to move on.

As dark fell the two officers set out once more for a better hiding-place higher up the mountains, but by midnight their guide had lost the way and the rest of the night was spent halted in the open with snow falling steadily. At dawn the climb was continued until the hut was found. By now Arthur's feet and hands were in a desperate state, with his fingers smothered in frostbite blisters. Hare's left foot was also affected, with the little toe black from the frost.

For three days they existed in the hut while Arthur's condition grew worse. Hare arranged for him to be carried back to Vale village, as a first stage on the way to the outskirts of Tirana where it was hoped an Albanian doctor could be induced to attend to him.

Five peasants bore him away the next afternoon, his feet, his hands and one arm now out of action. Unable to carry him far in that rough going the peasants laid him on his coat and dragged him over



28. LT.-COL. ARTHUR NICHOLLS, COLDSTREAM GUARDS

the snow. At some stage a mule was brought to carry him, but Arthur must have fallen heavily from it, as the last reports say he had a dislocated shoulder in addition to his other troubles.

He finally reached the house of Leka Pasha, whom he had met at the conference with the Ball Kombetar at Shengerj. Leka could speak English fluently and summoned the surgeon, Osman, without delay.

In the house an operation was performed to amputate the frostbitten toes. For a while a great hope was held that Arthur had been saved, but septicæmia set in and at last his heart failed from the great strain that he had put on it.

He was buried at Valijas, on the land of Dr. Ihsan Toptani.

When the news of his gallant conduct reached England the King approved the posthumous award of the George Cross, the last paragraph of the citation reading: 'He carried on far longer than could normally be considered humanly possible, and this undoubtedly caused his death.'

APPENDIX I

MENTION of gold has frequently been made in this book and some explanation is due to the taxpayer as to why the expenditure of large sums of this unusual currency was necessary. In an enemy-occupied country, paper money is never an asset, except for small change for small transactions, but gold is a universal currency which the most backward of peasants understand, which produces an immediate response and will melt the hardest of hearts. In Albania one could buy most men with gold and achieve surprising results with it; for example, when we bought large quantities of fodder and tents on El Basan from a German quartermaster. Equally, it might prove a boomerang. There was always a danger that a Britisher might be betrayed for the gold he carried, with threats and pressure applied to try to induce him to part with some sovereigns.

Another great disadvantage of gold was that, being heavy and bulky, it could not be transported or concealed easily and quickly. In the early days of our Mission, however, it was essential to use gold. If we were to raise a resistance army without delay, we either had to produce bulk supplies of arms, equipment, clothing and food, or some readily acceptable money to buy what was available locally. At the time, enough aircraft could not be allotted to Special Operations to carry and drop bulk supplies into occupied countries, nor were there enough experienced pilots and crews to find the correct Dropping Zones. Accordingly, gold had to be used extravagantly until enough aeroplanes were available, when material

assistance would replace financial assistance. Altogether, about eighty thousand pounds was sent in to Albania.

There was, perhaps, a danger that inflation would be caused by the introduction of large sums of gold into the country, and too easy supply of gold would create a demand for more and more. Instead of promoting fighting against the Axis we would be encouraging politics and propaganda.

The Mission itself had to live on the country, rent houses, buy animals, pay mulemen, pay agents, promote sabotage—there seemed no limit to the expenses with which we were faced.

Each of us carried a small amount of sovereigns for emergency and also some paper money for house-keeping, though it was not easily come by and eventually had to be found in Italy. Bulk supplies of sovereigns or napoleons were dropped in for specific purposes to Mission Headquarters. Many of the bags holding the gold bore seals made in the 1914-18 war and may well have been prepared originally for the revolt in the desert led by Lawrence of Arabia. We wondered how many sovereigns he paid for a camel.

At Headquarters we accounted for expenditure monthly, acknowledging money received and asking permission to spend large sums. Our Headquarters in Cairo or Italy were always understanding of our difficulties in the field and did not insist on too much red tape or quarterly audit boards. In any case we were not likely to be visited by the Command secretary's representative on behalf of the Treasury.

The largest individual amount it was agreed I should disburse was fifteen thousand sovereigns, to establish food dumps all over the country, to feed the growing Partisan forces and the many thousands of Italian soldiers who had come up into the mountains at the Italian armistice. This was sent to me in two

instalments—the first was handed to the Council, but the second arrived just as the situation was deteriorating so gravely. We could not carry this heavy weight while we were on the run, nor could the Council. I, therefore, said nothing about it and had it dumped secretly into the bottom of our used latrine pit in the garden of the house we were occupying, and there it remained safely until the end of the war. When I returned to London I reported the disposal of the sovereigns. Learning that a small British Mission was still in Tirana, I had a code message sent to it describing the hiding-place and asking for the gold to be recovered, if possible. Shortly afterwards a reply was received saying, 'All gold recovered, at much personal inconvenience.'

APPENDIX II

I AM indebted to Lieut.-Col. Achille Rossitto, formerly Commander, 1st Battalion Arezzo Infantry Regiment, for the following extracts from the Italian Forces news bulletin, and a report to the Ministry of War.

Mrs. C. Y. Morgan, Radley College, Berkshire, very kindly made the translations.

NOTIZIARIO DELL' ESERCITO, November 15th, 1945

Italian and English Valour in Albania

Albania seems destined to be the theatre of unknown acts of valour, of obscure acts of heroism carried out by Italian combatants, abandoned to confusion upon its rocky, marshy or muddy soil, often in the most critical, difficult, desperate conditions of time, circumstance and place. When finally it will be possible to write the true, complete and documented history of the bitter campaign waged upon the Greco-Albanian frontier in the years 1940-41, all those who read it will, without doubt, be dumbfounded with admiration to learn of the almost superhuman feats of resistance, tenacity, self-sacrifice and daring of which the humble and obscure soldiery of Italy were capable in the face of difficulties of every kind, almost unsurmountable, and of such a kind as truly to make the heart fail at the very thought of having to face them.

Perhaps—if it is possible—even more tragic, wearisome and desperate were the misfortunes through which divisions and sparse handfuls of the Italian garrison, surprised in Albania by the catastrophic events of September 1943, cut off, lost, disintegrated,

exhausted, were able time and time again to reassemble, reform their ranks, obtain new weapons, and return to the combat with inexhaustible ardour, with unshakable and unbeatable faith.

British Heroes

In January 1944, during an operative phase characterised by incessant and overwhelming offensive thrusts by the Germans, which severely tested and very largely dislocated the scattered preparations of the Partisan Resistance, Gen. Davies, surprised and surrounded by the enemy in the village of Kostenje, after defending himself heroically for a long time, though already wounded in the abdomen, was finally captured by the Germans and taken in a serious condition to the military hospital at Tirana, where he died.

Also his Chief of Staff, the valiant Lieut.-Col. Nicholls, after a miraculous escape from the encirclement at Kostenje, was stricken with grave congestion in the lower limbs. He might possibly have been saved by prompt surgical intervention, but since this, owing to the complete lack of equipment of this kind among the Partisan formations, involved surrender to the Germans, Lieut.-Col. Nicholls decided against it, resisting all persuasion and advice to the contrary, asserting that no Nicholls had ever been made a prisoner. He died stoically, a prey to terrible sufferings.

The memory of the two heroic British officers lives always in the warm gratitude of every partisan who had occasion to know them, and especially in that of the Italians, who were always the object of their particular care and consideration.

In the afternoon of the same day, the Firenze Division and the sections of the 'Arezzo' were arrayed in defence of the hills around Kruja so as to form a

careful defence, since a counter-attack was taking shape among German columns coming from Tirana, from Durazzo and from Scutari.

During the night of September 22nd-23rd, 1943, the 1st Battalion 226 Regiment received the order to return to Kruja. There, while I was in conference with Gen. —, two messengers from the 1st Battalion of the 128 and from the 1st Battalion of the 127 Infantry respectively, reported that motorised German columns (about 75 vehicles) were drawing in under the dispositions of our defence. I then proposed to Gen. — that we should attack the columns while they were unfavourably situated, but he replied that this order could only be given by Gen. —. I then betook myself to Divisional Command, but the General was resting. I then spoke with his Chief of S.M., Major —, who informed me that he would have the columns attacked by partisans, since according to him, the area 'was crawling with partisans.'

The battalion inserted itself between the battalion of the Brenner Division on the left and elements of the G.A.F. and CC. RR. on the right. The 2nd Company, reinforced by a machine-gun platoon of the battalion, was in the tactical area controlled by the Albanian major, Abas Kupi, and had the task of protecting the right wing of the disposition, where were also operating a rearguard company of infantry and Albanian partisan formations.

I had occasion to note, however, that in spite of the fact that the area was 'crawling with partisans,' no action, not even interference, was initiated, so that the enemy was able to carry out his operations undisturbed.

On the evening of December 19th at 1600 hours a partisan courier arrived with written orders for the

New Italy Battalion to go in 'war formation' to the Biza—S. Giorgio roadfork (S. Giorgio pass), since an attack by German formations was expected. The battalion repaired at once to the position indicated, and the command of the El Basan military zone left the barracks of Limnos to ascend the surrounding heights. In order to avoid any chance of surprise to the battalion arrayed at the S. Giorgio pass I ordered the battery of the 41 artillery to arrange themselves in defence between the two heights astride the road. I must mention here that the battery (already partly disarmed by the partisans, since the guns had been confiscated) was about fifty men strong, of whom only a score were armed with muskets. It turned out that neither the battalion nor the patrols (commanded by officers) sent out by me, met partisan elements in the locality indicated, contrary to what had been communicated from the partisan command. In spite of the patrols sent out by me and commanded by officers, I could not make contact with the battalion, since it had moved from the pass, and also because of the thick mist which blotted out the view.

The battalion took up a second-line position, having in front of it the 2nd Albanian Brigade in its entirety.

The night passed quietly and so also did the following morning, without a single shot being heard in the valley from which the attack was expected, and in which were the Albanian partisans. Because of the thick mist which made visibility practically nil, patrols were sent out along the road and towards the village of S. Giorgio; patrols which returned with nothing to report. This being so, together with the calm which had reigned throughout the whole area during the night and the morning, made us suppose that it was a question of the usual false alarms, and so towards midday the battalion went, remaining always near

the pass, to a position which would give the soldiers an opportunity of preparing a meal.

For security some patrols were left along the route. A little later, upon the hills overlooking the road, numerous and strong German formations appeared, which immediately opened strong fire with automatic weapons. Evidently also the patrols had been surprised by the German troops, which had come near, with the advantage of the mist, without meeting resistance on the part of the 2nd Albanian Brigade, which, as usual, had left the zone on the first appearance of the enemy troops, without giving the battalion any warning.

To such an unexpected and violent attack the battalion, which at that moment above all was in a disadvantageous position (a little valley running through the pass), could not possibly reply, but was able, just in time, to break up into small nuclei, which then rejoined in the centre of the area. During the 21st and 22nd the battalion wandered in the mountains.

So I transferred myself to the zone of Dajti, where I planned to join the 2nd Albanian Partisan Brigade, which I never succeeded in finding. I found out later that both the 2nd and 3rd Partisan Brigades had dispersed and the remnants were moving towards Southern Albania. Forced to stop on account of a violent fever, I presented myself to Ciacci, Abas Kupa's chief of S.M. (ex Lieut.-Col. of the Albanian CC. RR.), by whom I was taken in and succoured.

I returned with the partisans and took up once more the usual guerrilla life, first with the 1st Division, commanded by Gen. Ndalj Ndreu, and then with the Italian battalion, 'Antonio Gramsci.'

With the 'Gramsci' Battalion I was asked by the mass of the combatants to assume command, but this

was advised against by Ndalj Ndreu because the battalion had then a much reduced organisation and, therefore, not adequate to my rank. . . . I already knew that it would not have been very welcome to the Albanians to have a superior Italian officer at the head of a combatant division, because of their aversion to the category of officers (except for officers of artillery divisions, and those of the 81 Mortar Division, because the technicalities of these arms were little known to Albanian partisans).

Gen. Mehmet Sheu, fanatical and intransigent Communist, cultured, polyglot and intelligent, speaking fluent Italian, was the only influential chief who was able to estimate and value the Italians as combatants.

He nominated me 'military adviser' to the battalion (a task which I accepted), modelling himself on the rules of the Bolshevik Army of 1917-27, according to which the Czarist officer might assume the task of military adviser of an army without having command of it.

NOTIZIARIO DELL' ESERCITO, November 22nd, 1945

Details of the Partisan Struggle in Albania

Lieut.-Col. Achille Rossitto, formerly commanding the 1st Battalion of the 'Arezzo' Infantry Regiment, and then the Partisan military zone of El Basan, has sent us the following details concerning the subject-matter of the article entitled 'Italian and English Valour in Albania,' published in the preceding number of the *Notiziario*:

1. The valorous English Gen. Davies, captured by the Germans in January 1944 in such a serious condition as to justify the rumour of his death, which persisted among the partisans of Albania, who were most devoted to him, has instead survived. When the

Germans were forced to evacuate Albania they carried the brave general in their train as far as Germany, weak though he still was on account of the serious wound received in battle. The final victorious offensive of the Allies brought liberty to Davies, who was at length able to return to England.

2. The interest and approval of this General Davies were not limited to the New Italy Battalion (composed largely of elements of the 226 Infantry Regiment 'Arezzo'), but extended also to the other fighting Italians of the El Basan zone.

3. Let us express to the heroic General Davies our most hearty congratulations on the danger avoided, pointing out to him that, according to an ancient popular Italian belief, false rumours of death are to be read as prognostications of a long and prosperous life.

GLOSSARY

AKTIV Regular soldier.

BAJRAKTAR An Albanian leader supported by taxes; a 'flag bearer'; a village president.

BEKTASHI A priest of Bektash sect of Moslem religion.

BLUT Blood.

CABRANK A flight of fighter aircraft, kept in the air above an area, ready to attack a target on radio orders from the ground.

CHERMENIKA The mountain area to the north-east of El Basan.

CHETA An Albanian armed party about platoon size.

COMMISSAR Political representative with partisan troops.

COOKERETTES Sheep's entrails, grilled on a spit and divided into round slices.

DEUTSCH FEINDLICH An enemy of Germany.

DUKER A wild boar.

ERSATZ Imitation.

FELDWEBEL A German sergeant-major.

FEU DE JOIE A rifle-fire salute.

FLAK German anti-aircraft fire (*Flieger Abwehr Kanone*).

FLIEGER A flier.

GENERAL Pronounced in German with a hard 'g,' as in 'gate.'

GROPPi A confectioner in Cairo.

G.S.O.I General Staff Officer, 1st grade.

GUT, DANKE Good, thank you.

HAUPTMANN A captain.

HOXHA or HOJA An Albanian priest.

IT-STIT-ZINE A German aperient.

KAPUT German slang for 'finished.'

KARTOFFEL Potato.

K RATIONS American rations made up in composite meals.

L.N.C. Albanian left wing party. Later became F.N.C.
L.O. Liaison officer.
MÄDCHEN Maidens.
MAGYAR Hungarian.
MANGIARE Eat.
M.I.S.R. Egyptian air line.
M.L. Motor-launch.
MORGEN FRÜH Tomorrow morning.
M.S. Military Secretary, dealing with promotions and appointments of officers.
M.T. Mechanical transport.
NICHT WAHR? Is it not so?
OBERST A colonel.
O.K.W. German Army G.H.Q. (*Ober Kommando Wehrmacht*).
O.S.S. American equivalent of S.O.E.
PANZER FAUST A tank destroyer.
PEK-MESS Fruit juice.
RAKI Local spirit, distilled from plums and grapes.
R'AUS! Get out!
RECCE Reconnaissance.
R.H.A. Royal Horse Artillery.
R.T. Radio telephony.
SALA D'OPERAZIONE Operating theatre.
SANITÄT Connected with a hospital, e.g. an orderly or an aircraft.
SCHLOSS A castle.
SCHWESTER Sister.
S.D. Security police troops (*Sicherheits Dienst*).
'SEA VIEW' Terminal of our M.L. service with Bari.
SONDER FUEHRER An interpreter.
SPANDAU A German machine-gun.
SPRITZE An injection.
s.s. Nazi security forces (*Schutz Staffel*).
TODT German pioneer organisation.
UNTERSUCHUNGSGEFÄNGNIS Military prison for cases awaiting courts martial.
VERSTEHEN SIE? Do you understand?
VOLKSDEUTSCH German people naturalised in a foreign country.

WEHRMACHT Army.

WIE GEHTS? How are you getting on?

W.T. Wireless telegraphy.

WUNDERBAR! Wonderful!

WURST German sausage.

YASHMAK A face veil below the eyes.

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